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MY LADY'S MONEY AND PERCY AND THE PROPHET

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MY LADY'S MONEY

AND

PERCY AND THE PROPHET.

BY

WILKIE COLLINS.

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MY LADY'S MONEY:

AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF A YOUNG GIRL.

PERSONS OF THE STORY.

WOMEN.

LADY LYDIARD (*Widow of Lord Lydiard*).
ISABEL MILLER (*her Adopted Daughter*).
MISS PINK (*of South Morden*).
THE HON. MRS. DRUMBLADE (*Sister of the Hon. Alfred Hardyman*).

MEN.

THE HON. ALFRED HARDYMAN (*of the Stud Farm*).
MR. FELIX SWEETSIR (*Lady Lydiard's Nephew*).
ROBERT MOODY (*Lady Lydiard's Factotum*).
MR. TROY (*Lady Lydiard's Lawyer*).
OLD SHARON (*in the Byeways of Legal Bohemia*).

ANIMAL.

TOMMIE (*Lady Lydiard's Dog*).

PART THE FIRST.

THE DISAPPEARANCE.

CHAPTER I.

OLD Lady Lydiard sat meditating by the fireside, with three letters lying open on her lap.

Time had discoloured the paper, and had turned the ink to a brownish hue. The letters were all addressed to the same person—"THE RIGHT HON. LORD LYDIARD"—and were all signed in the same way—"Your affectionate cousin, James Tollmidge." Judged by these specimens of his correspondence, Mr. Tollmidge must have possessed one great merit as a letter writer—the merit of brevity. He will weary nobody's patience, if he is allowed to have a hearing. Let him, therefore, be permitted, in his own highflown way, to speak for himself.

First Letter:—"My statement, as your Lordship requests, shall be short and to the point. I was doing very well as a portrait-painter in the country; and I had a wife and children to consider. Under these circumstances, if I had been left to decide for myself, I should certainly have waited until I had saved a little money before I ventured on the serious expense

of taking a house and studio at the west end of London. Your Lordship, I positively declare, encouraged me to try the experiment without waiting. And here I am, unknown and unemployed, a helpless artist lost in London—with a sick wife and hungry children, and bankruptcy staring me in the face. On whose shoulders does this dreadful responsibility rest? On your Lordship's!"

Second letter:—"After a week's delay, you favour me, my Lord, with a curt reply. I can be equally curt on my side. I indignantly deny that I or my wife have ever presumed to use your Lordship's name as a means of recommendation to sitters without your permission. Some enemy has slandered us. I claim as my right to know the name of that enemy."

Third (and last) letter:—"Another week has passed—and not a word of answer has reached me from your Lordship. It matters little. I have employed the interval in making inquiries, and I have at last discovered the hostile influence which has estranged you from me. I have been, it seems, so unfortunate as to offend Lady Lydiard (how, I cannot imagine); and the all-powerful influence of this noble lady is now used against the struggling artist who is united to you by the sacred ties of kindred. Be it so. I can fight my way upwards, my Lord, as other men have done before me. A day may yet come when the throng of carriages waiting at the door of the fashionable portrait-painter will include her Ladyship's vehicle, and bring me the tardy expression of her Ladyship's regret. I refer you, my Lord Lydiard, to that day!"

Having read Mr. Tollmidge's formidable assertions relating to herself for the second time, Lady Lydiard's meditations came to an abrupt end. She rose, took the letters in both hands to tear them up, hesitated, and threw them back into the cabinet drawer in which she had discovered them, among other papers that had not been arranged since Lord Lydiard's death.

"The idiot!" said her Ladyship, thinking of Mr. Tollmidge. "I never even heard of him, in my husband's lifetime; I never even knew that he was really related to Lord Lydiard, till I found his letters. What is to be done next?"

She looked, as she put that question to herself, at an open newspaper thrown on the table, which announced the death of "that accomplished artist Mr. Tollmidge, related, it is said, to the late well-known connoisseur, Lord Lydiard." In the next sentence the writer of the obituary notice deplored the destitute condition of Mrs. Tollmidge and her children, "thrown helpless on the mercy of the world." Lady Lydiard stood by the table, with her eyes on those lines, and saw but too plainly the direction in which they pointed —the direction of her cheque-book.

Turning towards the fireplace, she rang the bell. "I can do nothing in this matter," she thought to herself, "until I know whether the report about Mrs. Tollmidge and her family is to be depended on. Has Moody come back?" she asked, when the servant appeared at the door. "Moody" (otherwise her Ladyship's steward) had not come back. Lady Lydiard dismissed the subject of the artist's widow from further consideration until the steward returned, and gave her mind to a question of domestic interest which lay

nearer to her heart. Her favourite dog had been ailing for some time past, and no report of him had reached her that morning. She opened a door near the fire-place, which led, through a little corridor hung with rare prints, to her own boudoir. "Isabel!" she called out, "how is Tommie?"

A fresh young voice answered, from behind the curtain which closed the further end of the corridor, "No better, my Lady."

A low growl followed the fresh young voice, and added (in dog's language), "Much worse, my Lady—much worse!"

Lady Lydiard closed the door again, with a compassionate sigh for Tommie, and walked slowly to and fro in her spacious drawing-room, waiting for the steward's return.

Accurately described, Lord Lydiard's widow was short and fat, and perilously near her sixtieth birthday. But it may be said, without paying a compliment, that she looked younger than her age by ten years at least. Her complexion was of that delicate pink tinge which is sometimes seen in old women with well-preserved constitutions. Her eyes (equally well preserved) were of that hard light blue colour which wears well, and does not wash out when tried by the test of tears. Add to this her short nose, her plump cheeks that set wrinkles at defiance, her white hair dressed in stiff little curls; and, if a doll could grow old, Lady Lydiard, at sixty, would have been the living image of that doll—taking life easily on its journey downwards to the prettiest of tombs, in a burial-ground where the myrtles and roses grew all the year round!

These being her Ladyship's personal merits, im-

partial history must acknowledge, on the list of her defects, a total want of tact and taste in her attire. The lapse of time since Lord Lydiard's death had left her at liberty to dress as she pleased. She arranged her short, clumsy figure in colours that were far too bright for a woman of her age. Her dresses, badly chosen as to their hues, were perhaps not badly made, but were certainly badly worn. Morally, as well as physically, it must be said of Lady Lydiard that her outward side was her worst side. The anomalies of her dress were matched by the anomalies of her character. There were moments when she felt and spoke as became a lady of rank; and there were other moments when she felt and spoke as might have become the cook in the kitchen. Beneath these superficial inconsistencies, the great heart, the essentially true and generous nature of the woman, only waited the sufficient occasion to assert themselves. In the trivial intercourse of society she was open to ridicule on every side of her. But when a serious emergency tried the metal of which she was really made, the people who were loudest in laughing at her stood aghast, and wondered what had become of the familiar companion of their every-day lives.

Her Ladyship's promenade had lasted but a little while, when a man in black clothing presented himself noiselessly at the great door which opened on the staircase. Lady Lydiard signed to him impatiently to enter the room.

"I have been expecting you for some time, Moody," she said. "You look tired. Take a chair."

The man in black bowed respectfully, and took his seat.

CHAPTER II.

ROBERT MOODY was at this time nearly forty years of age. He was a shy, quiet, dark person, with a pale, closely-shaven face, agreeably animated by large, black eyes, set deep in their orbits. His mouth was perhaps his best feature: he had firm, well-shaped lips, which softened on rare occasions into a particularly winning smile. The whole look of the man, in spite of his habitual reserve, declared him to be eminently trustworthy. His position in Lady Lydiard's household was in no sense of the menial sort. He acted as her almoner and secretary as well as her steward—distributed her charities, wrote her letters on business, paid her bills, engaged her servants, stocked her wine-cellar, was authorised to borrow books from her library, and was served with his meals in his own room. His parentage gave him claims to these special favours: he was by birth entitled to rank as a gentleman. His father had failed at a time of commercial panic as a country banker, had paid a good dividend, and had died in exile abroad a broken-hearted man. Robert had tried to hold his place in the world, but adverse fortune kept him down. Undeserved disaster followed him from one employment to another, until he abandoned the struggle, bade a last farewell to the pride of other days, and accepted the position considerately and delicately offered to him in Lady Lydiard's house. He had now no near relations living,

and he had never made many friends. In the intervals of occupation he led a lonely life in this little room. It was a matter of secret wonder among the women in the servants' hall, considering his personal advantages and the opportunities which must surely have been thrown in his way, that he had never tempted fortune in the character of a married man. Robert Moody entered into no explanations on that subject. In his own sad and quiet way he continued to lead his own sad and quiet life. The women all failing, from the handsome housekeeper downwards, to make the smallest impression on him, consoled themselves by prophetic visions of his future relations with the sex, and predicted vindictively that "his time would come."

"Well," said Lady Lydiard, "and what have you done?"

"Your Ladyship seemed to be anxious about the dog," Moody answered, in the low tone which was habitual to him. "I went first to the veterinary surgeon. He has been called away into the country; and"——

Lady Lydiard waved away the conclusion of the sentence with her hand. "Never mind the surgeon. We must find somebody else. Where did you go next?"

"To your Ladyship's lawyer. Mr. Troy wished me to say that he will have the pleasure of waiting on you"——

"Pass over the lawyer, Moody. I want to know about the painter's widow. Is it true that Mrs. Tollmidge and her family are left in helpless poverty?"

"Not quite true, my Lady. I have seen the clergyman of the parish, who takes an interest in the case"——

Lady Lydiard interrupted her steward for the third time. "You have not mentioned my name?" she asked, sharply.

"Certainly not, my Lady. I followed my instructions, and described you as a benevolent person in search of cases of real distress. It is quite true that Mr. Tollmidge has died, leaving nothing to his family. But the widow has a little income of seventy pounds in her own right."

"Is that enough to live on, Moody?" her Ladyship asked.

"Enough, in this case, for the widow and her daughter," Moody answered. "The difficulty is to pay the few debts left standing, and to start the two sons in life. They are reported to be steady lads; and the family is much respected in the neighbourhood. The clergyman proposes to get a few influential names to begin with, and to start a subscription."

"No subscription!" protested Lady Lydiard. "Mr. Tollmidge was Lord Lydiard's cousin; and Mrs. Tollmidge is related to his Lordship by marriage. It would be degrading to my husband's memory to have the begging-box sent round for his relations, no matter how distant they may be. Cousins!" exclaimed her Ladyship, suddenly descending from the lofty ranges of sentiment to the low. "I hate the very name of them! A person who is near enough to me to be my relation and far enough off from me to be my sweetheart, is a double-faced sort of person that I don't like. Let's get back to the widow and her sons. How much do they want?"

"A subscription of five hundred pounds, my Lady,

would provide for everything—if it could only be collected."

"It *shall* be collected, Moody! I will pay the subscription out of my own purse." Having asserted herself in those noble terms, she spoilt the effect of her own outburst of generosity by dropping to the sordid view of the subject in her next sentence. "Five hundred pounds is a good bit of money, though; isn't it, Moody?"

"It is, indeed, my Lady." Rich and generous as he knew his mistress to be, her proposal to pay the whole subscription took the steward by surprise. Lady Lydiard's quick perception instantly detected what was passing in his mind.

"You don't quite understand my position in this matter," she said. "When I read the newspaper notice of Mr. Tollmidge's death, I searched among his Lordship's papers to see if they really were related. I discovered some letters from Mr. Tollmidge, which showed me that he and Lord Lydiard were cousins. One of those letters contains some very painful statements, reflecting most untruly and unjustly on my conduct;—lies, in short," her Ladyship burst out, losing her dignity, as usual. "Lies, Moody, for which Mr. Tollmidge deserved to be horsewhipped. I would have done it myself if his Lordship had told me at the time. No matter; it's useless to dwell on the thing now," she continued, ascending again to the forms of expression which became a lady of rank. "This unhappy man has done me a gross injustice; my motives may be seriously misjudged, if I appear personally in communicating with his family. If I relieve them anonymously in their present trouble, I spare them the

exposure of a public subscription; and I do what I believe his Lordship would have done himself if he had lived. My desk is on the other table. Bring it here, Moody; and let me return good for evil, while I'm in the humour for it!"

Moody obeyed in silence. Lady Lydiard wrote a cheque.

"Take that to the banker's, and bring back a five-hundred-pound note," she said. "I'll inclose it to the clergyman as coming from 'an unknown friend.' And be quick about it. I am only a fallible mortal, Moody. Don't leave me time enough to take the stingy view of five hundred pounds."

Moody went out with the cheque. No delay was to be apprehended in obtaining the money; the banking-house was hard by, in St. James's-street. Left alone, Lady Lydiard decided on occupying her mind in the generous direction by composing her anonymous letter to the clergyman. She had just taken a sheet of note-paper from her desk, when a servant appeared at the door announcing a visitor—

"Mr. Felix Sweetsir!"

CHAPTER III.

"My nephew!" Lady Lydiard exclaimed, in a tone which expressed astonishment, but certainly not pleasure as well. "How many years is it since you and I last met?" she asked, in her abruptly straightforward way, as Mr. Felix Sweetsir approached her writing-table.

The visitor was not a person easily discouraged.

He took Lady Lydiard's hand, and kissed it with easy grace. A shade of irony was in his manner, agreeably relieved by a playful flash of tenderness.

"Years, my dear aunt?" he said. "Look in your glass and you will see that time has stood still since we met last. How wonderfully well you wear! When shall we celebrate the appearance of your first wrinkle? I am too old; I shall never live to see it."

He took an easy-chair, uninvited; placed himself close at his aunt's side, and ran his eye over her ill-chosen dress with an air of satirical admiration. "How perfectly successful!" he said, with his well-bred insolence. "What a chaste gaiety of colour!"

"What do you want?" asked her Ladyship, not in the least softened by the compliment.

"I want to pay my respects to my dear aunt," Felix answered, perfectly impenetrable to his ungracious reception, and perfectly comfortable in a spacious arm-chair.

No pen-and-ink portrait need surely be drawn of Felix Sweetsir—he is too well known a picture in society. The little lithe man, with his bright, restless eyes, and his long iron-grey hair falling in curls to his shoulders; his airy step and his cordial manner; his uncertain age, his innumerable accomplishments, and his unbounded popularity—is he not familiar everywhere, and welcome everywhere? How gratefully he receives, how prodigally he repays, the cordial appreciation of an admiring world! Every man he knows is "a charming fellow." Every woman he sees is "sweetly pretty." What picnics he gives on the banks of the Thames in the summer season! What a well-earned little income he derives from the whist-table!

What an inestimable actor he is at private theatricals of all sorts (weddings included)! Did you never read Sweetsir's novel, dashed off in the intervals of curative perspiration at a German bath? Then you don't know what brilliant fiction really is. He has never written a second work; he does everything, and only does it once. One song—the despair of professional composers. One picture—just to show how easily a gentleman can take up an art and drop it again. A really multiform man, with all the grace and all the accomplishments scintillating perpetually at his fingers' ends. If these poor pages have achieved nothing else, they have done a service to persons not in society presenting them to Sweetsir. In his gracious company the narrative brightens; and writer and reader (catching reflected brilliancy) understand each other at last, thanks to Sweetsir.

"Well," said Lady Lydiard, "now you are here, what have you got to say for yourself? You have been abroad, of course? Where?"

"Principally at Paris, my dear aunt. The only place that is fit to live in—for this excellent reason, that the French are the only people who know how to make the most of life. One has relations and friends in England; and every now and then one returns to London"——

"When one has spent all one's money in Paris," her Ladyship interposed. "That's what you were going to say, isn't it?"

Felix submitted to the interruption with his delightful good-humour.

"What a bright creature you are!" he exclaimed. "What would I not give for your flow of spirits! Yes

—one does spend money in Paris, as you say. The clubs, the stock exchange, the racecourse: you try your luck here, there, and everywhere; and you lose and win, win and lose—and you haven't a dull day to complain of." He paused, his smile died away, he looked inquiringly at Lady Lydiard. "What a wonderful existence yours must be," he resumed. "The everlasting question with your needy fellow-creatures, 'Where am I to get money?' is a question that has never passed your lips. Enviable woman!" He paused once more—surprised and puzzled this time. "What is the matter, my dear aunt? You seem to be suffering under some uneasiness."

"I am suffering under your conversation," her Ladyship answered, sharply. "Money is a sore subject with me just now," she went on, with her eyes on her nephew, watching the effect of what she said. "I have spent five hundred pounds this morning with a scrape of my pen. And, only a week since, I yielded to temptation and made an addition to my picture-gallery." She looked, as she said those words, towards an archway at the farther end of the room, closed by curtains of purple velvet. "I really tremble when I think of what that one picture cost me before I could call it mine. A landscape by Hobbema; and the National Gallery bidding against me. Never mind!" she concluded, consoling herself, as usual, with considerations that were beneath her. "Hobbema will sell at my death for a bigger price than I gave for him—that's one comfort!" She looked again at Felix; a smile of mischievous satisfaction began to show itself in her face. "Anything wrong with your watch-chain?" she asked.

Felix, absently playing with his watch-chain, started as if his aunt had suddenly awakened him. While Lady Lydiard had been speaking his vivacity had subsided little by little, and had left him looking so serious and so old that his most intimate friend would hardly have known him again. Roused by the sudden question that had been put to him, he seemed to be casting about in his mind in search of the first excuse for his silence that might turn up. "I was wondering," he began, "why I miss something when I look round this beautiful room; something familiar, you know, that I fully expected to find here."

"Tommie?" suggested Lady Lydiard, still watching her nephew as maliciously as ever.

"That's it!" cried Felix, seizing his excuse, and rallying his spirits. "Why don't I hear Tommie snarling behind me; why don't I feel Tommie's teeth in my trousers?"

The smile vanished from Lady Lydiard's face; the tone taken by her nephew in speaking of her dog was disrespectful in the extreme. She showed him plainly that she disapproved of it. Felix went on, nevertheless, impenetrable to reproof of the silent sort. "Dear little Tommie! So delightfully fat; and such an infernal temper! I don't know whether I hate him or love him. Where is he?"

"Ill in bed," answered her Ladyship, with a gravity which startled even Felix himself. "I wish to speak to you about Tommie. You know everybody. Do you know of a good dog-doctor? The person I have employed so far doesn't at all satisfy me."

"Professional person?" inquired Felix.

"Yes."

"All humbugs, my dear aunt. The worse the dog gets the bigger the bill grows, don't you see? I have got the man for you—a gentleman. Knows more about horses and dogs than all the veterinary surgeons put together. We met in the boat yesterday crossing the Channel. You know him by name, of course? Lord Rotherfield's youngest son, Alfred Hardyman."

"The owner of the stud farm? The man who has bred the famous racehorses?" cried Lady Lydiard. "My dear Felix, how can I presume to trouble such a great personage about my dog?"

Felix burst into his genial laugh. "Never was modesty more wofully out of place," he rejoined. "Hardyman is dying to be presented to your Ladyship. He has heard, like everybody, of the magnificent decorations of this house, and he is longing to see them. His chambers are close by, in Pall-mall. If he is at home we will have him here in five minutes. Perhaps I had better see the dog first?"

Lady Lydiard shook her head. "Isabel says he had better not be disturbed," she answered. "Isabel understands him better than anybody."

Felix lifted his lively eyebrows with a mixed expression of curiosity and surprise. "Who is Isabel?"

Lady Lydiard was vexed with herself for carelessly mentioning Isabel's name in her nephew's presence. Felix was not the sort of person whom she was desirous of admitting to her confidence in domestic matters. "Isabel is an addition to my household since you were here last," she answered shortly.

"Young and pretty?" inquired Felix. "Ah! you look serious, and you don't answer me. Young and pretty evidently. Which may I see first, the addition

to your household or the addition to your picture-gallery? You look at the picture-gallery—I am answered again." He rose to approach the archway, and stopped at his first step forward. "A sweet girl is a dreadful responsibility, aunt," he resumed, with an ironical assumption of gravity. "Do you know, I shouldn't be surprised if Isabel, in the long run, cost you more than Hobbema. Who is this at the door?"

The person at the door was Robert Moody, returned from the bank. Mr. Felix Sweetsir, being near-sighted, was obliged to fit his eye-glass in position before he could recognise the prime minister of Lady Lydiard's household.

"Ha! our worthy Moody. How well he wears! Not a grey hair on his head—and look at mine! What dye do you use, Moody? If he had my open disposition he would tell. As it is, he looks unutterable things, and holds his tongue. Ah! if I could only have held *my* tongue—when I was in the diplomatic service, you know—what a position I might have occupied by this time! Don't let me interrupt you, Moody, if you have anything to say to Lady Lydiard."

Having acknowledged Mr. Sweetsir's lively greeting by a formal bow, and a grave look of wonder which respectfully repelled that vivacious gentleman's flow of humour, Moody turned towards his mistress.

"Have you got the bank-note?" asked her Ladyship.

Moody laid the bank-note on the table.

"Am I in the way?" inquired Felix.

"No," said his aunt. "I have a letter to write; it won't occupy me for more than a few minutes. You

can stay here, or go and look at the Hobbema, which you please."

Felix made a second sauntering attempt to reach the picture-gallery. Arrived within a few steps of the entrance, he stopped again, attracted by an open cabinet of Italian workmanship filled with rare old china. Being nothing if not a cultivated amateur, Mr. Sweetsir paused to pay his passing tribute of admiration before the contents of the cabinet. "Charming! charming!" he said to himself, with his head twisted appreciatively a little on one side. Lady Lydiard and Moody left him in undisturbed enjoyment of the china, and went on with the business of the bank-note.

"Ought we to take the number of the note, in case of accident?" asked her Ladyship.

Moody produced a slip of paper from his waistcoat pocket. "I took the number, my Lady, at the bank."

"Very well. You keep it. While I am writing my letter, suppose you direct the envelope. What is the clergyman's name?"

Moody mentioned the name and directed the envelope. Felix, happening to look round at Lady Lydiard and the steward while they were both engaged in writing, returned suddenly to the table as if he had been struck by a new idea.

"Is there a third pen?" he asked. "Why shouldn't I write a line at once to Hardyman, aunt? The sooner you have his opinion about Tommie the better—don't you think so?"

Lady Lydiard pointed to the pen-tray, with a smile. To show consideration for her dog was to seize irresistibly on the high-road to her favour. Felix set to

work on his letter, in a large scrambling hand-writing, with plenty of ink and noisy pen. "I declare we are like clerks in an office," he remarked, in his cheery way. "All with our noses to the paper, writing as if we lived by it! Here, Moody, let one of the servants take this at once to Mr. Hardyman's."

The messenger was dispatched. Robert returned, and waited near his mistress, with the directed envelope in his hand. Felix sauntered back slowly towards the picture-gallery, for the third time. In a moment more Lady Lydiard finished her letter, and folded up the bank-note in it. She had just taken the directed envelope from Moody, and had just placed the letter inside it—when a scream from the inner room, in which Isabel was nursing the sick dog, startled everybody. "My Lady! my Lady!" cried the girl, distractedly, "Tommie is in a fit! Tommie is dying!"

Lady Lydiard dropped the unclosed envelope on the table, and ran—yes, short as she was and fat as she was, ran—into the inner room. The two men, left together, looked at each other.

"Moody," said Felix, in his lazily-cynical way, "Do you think if you or I were in a fit that her Ladyship would run? Bah! these are the things that shake one's faith in human nature. I feel infernally seedy. That cursed Channel passage—I tremble in my inmost stomach when I think of it. Get me something, Moody."

"What shall I send you, Sir?" Moody asked, coldly.

"Some dry curaçoa and a biscuit. And let it be brought to me in the picture-gallery. Damn the dog! I'll go and look at Hobbema."

This time he succeeded in reaching the archway, and disappeared behind the curtains of the picture-gallery.

CHAPTER IV.

LEFT alone in the drawing-room, Moody looked at the unfastened envelope on the table.

Considering the value of the inclosure, might he feel justified in wetting the gum and securing the envelope for safety's sake? After thinking it over, Moody decided that he was not justified in meddling with the letter. On reflection, her Ladyship might have changes to make in it—or might have a postscript to add to what she had already written. Apart, too, from these considerations, was it reasonable to act as if Lady Lydiard's house was an hotel, perpetually open to the intrusion of strangers. Objects worth twice five hundred pounds in the aggregate, were scattered about on the tables and in the unlocked cabinets all round him. Moody withdrew, without further hesitation, to order the light restoratives prescribed for himself by Mr. Sweetsir. The unclosed letter reposed in its place on the table.

The footman who took the curaçoa into the picture-gallery found Felix recumbent on a sofa—to all appearance so completely absorbed in the Hobbema that he was quite unable to look at anything else.

He took the curaçoa mechanically, drained the glass at a draught, and held it out to be filled for the second time. "Don't interrupt me," he said, peevishly, catching the servant in the act of staring at him. "Put down the bottle and go!" Forbidden to look at Mr.

Sweetsir, the man's eyes as he left the gallery turned wonderingly towards the famous landscape. And what did he see? He saw one towering big cloud in the sky that threatened rain, two withered mahagony-coloured trees sorely in want of rain, a muddy road greatly the worse for rain, and a vagabond boy running home who was afraid of the rain. That was the picture, to the footman's eye. He took a gloomy view of the state of Mr. Sweetsir's brains on his return to the servants' hall. "A slate loose, poor devil!" That was the footman's report of the brilliant Felix.

An interval of some minutes elapsed—and, at last, the silence in the picture-gallery was broken by voices penetrating into it from the drawing-room. Felix rose to a sitting position on the sofa. He had recognised the voice of Alfred Hardyman saying, "Don't disturb Lady Lydiard," and the voice of Moody answering, "I will just knock at the door of her Ladyship's room, Sir; you will find Mr. Sweetsir in the picture-gallery."

The curtains over the archway parted, and disclosed the figure of a tall lean man, with a closely cropped head set a little stiffly on his shoulders. The immovable gravity of face and manner which every Englishman seems to acquire who lives constantly in the society of horses, was the gravity which this gentleman displayed as he entered the picture-gallery. He was a finely made, sinewy man, with clearly cut, regular features. If he had not been affected with horses on the brain he would doubtless have been personally popular with the women. As it was, the serene and hippic gloom of the handsome horsebreeder daunted the daughters of Eve, and they failed to make up their minds about the exact value of him, socially considered. Alfred

Hardyman was nevertheless a remarkable man in his way. He had been offered the customary alternatives submitted to the younger sons of the nobility—the Church or the diplomatic service—and had refused the one and the other. "I like horses," he said, "and I mean to get my living out of them. Don't talk to me about my position in the world. Talk to my eldest brother, who gets the money and the title." Starting in life with these sensible views, and with a small capital of five thousand pounds, Hardyman took his own place in the sphere that was fitted for him. At the period of this narrative he was already a rich man, and one of the greatest authorities on horse-breeding in England. His prosperity made no change in him. He was always the same grave, quiet, obstinately resolute man—true to the few friends whom he admitted to his intimacy, and sincere to a fault in the expression of his feelings among persons whom he distrusted or disliked. As he entered the picture-gallery and paused for a moment looking at Felix on the sofa, his large, cold, steady grey eyes rested on the little man with an indifference that just verged on contempt. Felix, on the other hand, sprang to his feet with alert politeness and greeted his friend with exuberant cordiality.

"Dear old boy! This is so good of you," he began. "I feel it—I do assure you I feel it!"

"You needn't trouble yourself to feel it," was the quietly-ungracious answer. "Lady Lydiard brings me here. I come to see the house—and the dog." He looked round the gallery in his gravely attentive way. "I don't understand pictures," he remarked, resignedly. "I shall go back to the drawing-room."

After a moment's consideration, Felix followed him into the drawing-room, with the air of a man who was determined not to be repelled.

"Well?" asked Hardyman. "What is it?"

"About that matter?" Felix said, inquiringly.

"What matter?"

"Oh, you know. Will next week do?"

"Next week *won't* do."

Mr. Felix Sweetsir cast one look at his friend. His friend was too intently occupied with the decorations of the drawing-room to notice the look.

"Will to-morrow do?" Felix resumed, after an interval.

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"Between twelve and one in the afternoon."

"Between twelve and one in the afternoon," Felix repeated. He looked again at Hardyman and took his hat. "Make my apologies to my aunt," he said. "You must introduce yourself to her Ladyship. I can't wait here any longer." He walked out of the room, having deliberately returned the contemptuous indifference of Hardyman by a similar indifference on his own side, at parting.

Left by himself, Hardyman took a chair and glanced at the door which led into the boudoir. The steward had knocked at that door, had disappeared through it, and had not appeared again. How much longer was Lady Lydiard's visitor to be left unnoticed in Lady Lydiard's house?

As the question passed through his mind the boudoir door opened. For once in his life, Alfred Hardyman's composure deserted him. He started to

his feet, like an ordinary mortal taken completely by surprise.

Instead of Mr. Moody, instead of Lady Lydiard, there appeared in the open doorway a young woman in a state of embarrassment, who actually quickened the beat of Mr. Hardyman's heart the moment he set eyes on her. Was the person who produced this amazing impression at first sight a person of importance? Nothing of the sort. She was only "Isabel," surnamed "Miller." Even her name had nothing in it. Only "Isabel Miller!"

Had she any pretensions to distinction in virtue of her personal appearance?

It is not easy to answer the question. The women (let us put the worst judges first) had long since discovered that she wanted that indispensable elegance of figure which is derived from slimness of waist and length of limb. The men (who were better acquainted with the subject) looked at her figure from their point of view; and finding it essentially embraceable, asked for nothing more. It might have been her bright complexion, or it might have been the bold lustre of her eyes (as the women considered it), that dazzled the lords of creation generally, and made them all alike incompetent to discover her faults. Still, she had compensating attractions which no severity of criticism could dispute. Her smile, beginning at her lips, flowed brightly and instantly over her whole face. A delicious atmosphere of health, freshness, and good humour seemed to radiate from her wherever she went and whatever she did. For the rest, her brown hair grew low over her broad white forehead, and was topped by a neat little lace cap with ribbons of a violet colour.

A plain collar and plain cuffs encircled her smooth, round neck and her plump, dimpled hands. Her merino dress, covering but not hiding the charming outline of her bosom, matched the colour of her cap-ribbons, and was brightened by a white muslin apron coquettishly trimmed about the pockets, a gift from Lady Lydiard. Blushing and smiling, she let the door fall to behind her, and, shyly approaching the stranger, said to him, in her small, clear voice, "If you please, Sir, are you Mr. Hardyman?"

The gravity of the great horsebreeder deserted him at her first question. He smiled as he acknowledged that he was "Mr. Hardyman"—he smiled as he offered her a chair.

"No, thank you, Sir," she said, with a quaintly pretty inclination of her head. "I am only sent here to make her Ladyship's apologies. She has put the poor dear dog into a warm bath, and she can't leave him. And Mr. Moody can't come instead of me, because I was too frightened to be of any use, and so he had to hold the dog. That's all. We are very anxious, Sir, to know if the warm bath is the right thing. Please come into the room and tell us."

She led the way back to the door. Hardyman, naturally enough, was slow to follow her. When a man is fascinated by the charm of youth and beauty he is in no hurry to transfer his attention to a sick animal in a bath. Hardyman seized on the first excuse that he could devise for keeping Isabel to himself—that is to say, for keeping her in the drawing-room.

"I think I shall be better able to help you," he said, "if you will tell me something about the dog first."

Even his accent in speaking had altered to a certain degree. The quiet, dreary monotone in which he habitually spoke quickened a little under his present excitement. As for Isabel, she was too deeply interested in Tommie's welfare to suspect that she was being made the victim of a stratagem. She left the door and returned to Hardyman with eager eyes. "What can I tell you, Sir?" she asked innocently.

Hardyman pressed his advantage without mercy.

"You can tell me what sort of dog he is?"

"Yes, Sir."

"How old he is?"

"Yes, Sir."

"What his name is?—what his temper is?—what his illness is?—what diseases his father and mother had?—what"——

Isabel's head began to turn giddy. "One thing at a time, Sir!" she interposed, with a gesture of entreaty. "The dog sleeps on my bed, and I had a bad night with him, he disturbed me so, and I am afraid I am very stupid this morning. His name is Tommie. We are obliged to call him by it, because he won't answer to any other than the name he had when my Lady bought him. But we spell it with an i e at the end, which makes it less vulgar than Tommy with a y. I am very sorry, Sir—I forget what else you wanted to know. Please to come in here and my lady will tell you everything."

She tried to get back to the door of the boudoir. Hardyman, feasting his eyes on the pretty, changeful face that looked up at him with such innocent confidence in his authority, drew her away again from the

door by the one means at his disposal. He returned to his questions about Tommie.

"Wait a little, please. What sort of dog is he?"

Isabel turned back again from the door. To describe Tommie was a labour of love. "He is the most beautiful dog in the world!" the girl began, with kindling eyes. "He has the most exquisite white curly hair and two light brown patches on his back—and, oh! *such* lovely dark eyes! They call him a Scotch terrier. When he is well his appetite is truly wonderful—nothing comes amiss to him, Sir, from pâté de foie gras to potatoes. He has his enemies, poor dear, though you wouldn't think it. People who won't put up with being bitten by him (what shocking tempers one does meet with, to be sure!) call him a mongrel. Isn't it a shame? Please come in and see him, Sir; my Lady will be tired of waiting."

Another journey to the door followed those words, checked instantly by a serious objection.

"Stop a minute! You must tell me what his temper is, or I can do nothing for him."

Isabel returned once more, feeling that it was really serious this time. Her gravity was even more charming than her gaiety. As she lifted her face to him, with large solemn eyes, expressive of her sense of responsibility, Hardyman would have given every horse in his stables to have had the privilege of taking her in his arms and kissing her.

"Tommie has the temper of an angel with the people he likes," she said. "When he bites, it generally means that he objects to strangers. He loves my Lady, and he loves Mr. Moody, and he loves me,

and—and I think that's all. This way, Sir, if you please; I am sure I heard my Lady call."

"No," said Hardyman, in his immovably obstinate way. "Nobody called. About this dog's temper? Doesn't he take to any strangers? What sort of people does he bite in general?"

Isabel's pretty lips began to curl upward at the corners in a quaint smile. Hardyman's last imbecile question had opened her eyes to the true state of the case. Still, Tommie's future was in this strange gentleman's hands; she felt bound to consider that. And, moreover, it was no everyday event, in Isabel's experience, to fascinate a famous personage, who was also a magnificent and perfectly-dressed man. She ran the risk of wasting another minute or two, and went on with the memoirs of Tommie.

"I must own, Sir," she resumed, "that he behaves a little ungratefully—even to strangers who take an interest in him. When he gets lost in the streets (which is very often), he sits down on the pavement and howls till he collects a pitying crowd round him; and when they try to read his name and address on his collar he snaps at them. The servants generally find him and bring him back; and as soon as he gets home he turns round on the doorstep and snaps at the servants. I think it must be his fun. You should see him sitting up in his chair at dinner-time, waiting to be helped, with his fore paws on the edge of the table, like the hands of a gentleman at a public dinner making a speech. But, oh!" cried Isabel, checking herself, with the tears in her eyes, "how can I talk of him in this way when he is so dreadfully ill! Some of them say it's bronchitis, and some say it's his liver.

Only yesterday I took him to the front door to give him a little air, and he stood still on the pavement, quite stupefied. For the first time in his life, he snapped at nobody who went by; and, oh, dear, he hadn't even the heart to smell a lamp-post!"

Isabel had barely stated this last afflicting circumstance when the memoirs of Tommie were suddenly cut short by the voice of Lady Lydiard—really calling this time—from the inner room.

"Isabel! Isabel!" cried her Ladyship, "what are you about?"

Isabel ran to the door of the boudoir and threw it open. "Go in, Sir! Pray, go in!" she said.

"Without you?" Hardyman asked.

"I will follow you, Sir. I have something to do for her Ladyship first."

She still held the door open, and pointed entreatingly to the passage which led to the boudoir. "I shall be blamed, Sir," she said, "if you don't go in."

This statement of the case left Hardyman no alternative. He presented himself to Lady Lydiard without another moment of delay.

Having closed the drawing-room door on him, Isabel waited a little, absorbed in her own thoughts.

She was now perfectly well aware of the effect which she had produced on Hardyman. Her vanity, it is not to be denied, was flattered by his admiration —he was so grand and so tall, and he had such fine large eyes. The girl looked prettier than ever as she stood with her head down and her colour heightened, smiling to herself. A clock on the chimneypiece striking the half-hour roused her. She cast one look at

the glass, as she passed it, and went to the table at which Lady Lydiard had been writing.

Methodical Mr. Moody, in submitting to be employed as bath-attendant upon Tommie, had not forgotten the interests of his mistress. He reminded her Ladyship that she had left her letter, with a bank-note inclosed in it, unsealed. Absorbed in the dog, Lady Lydiard answered, "Isabel is doing nothing, let Isabel seal it. Show Mr. Hardyman in here," she continued, turning to Isabel, "and then seal a letter of mine which you will find on the table." "And when you have sealed it," careful Mr. Moody added, "put it back on the table; I will take charge of it when her Ladyship has done with me."

Such were the special instructions which now detained Isabel in the drawingroom. She lit the taper, and closed and sealed the open envelope, without feeling curiosity enough even to look at the address. Mr. Hardyman was the uppermost subject in her thoughts. Leaving the sealed letter on the table, she returned to the fireplace, and studied her own charming face attentively in the looking-glass. The time passed—and Isabel's reflection was still the subject of Isabel's contemplation. "He must see many beautiful ladies," she thought, veering backwards and forwards between pride and humility. "I wonder what he sees in Me?"

The clock struck the hour. Almost at the same moment the boudoir door opened, and Robert Moody, released at last from attendance on Tommie, entered the drawing-room.

CHAPTER V.

"WELL?" asked Isabel eagerly, "what does Mr. Hardyman say? Does he think he can cure Tommie?"

Moody answered a little coldly and stiffly. His dark, deeply-set eyes rested on Isabel with an uneasy look.

"Mr. Hardyman seems to understand animals," he said. "He lifted the dog's eyelid and looked at his eye, and then he told us the bath was useless."

"Go on!" said Isabel impatiently. "He did something, I suppose, besides telling you that the bath was useless?"

"He took a knife out of his pocket, with a lancet in it."

Isabel clasped her hands with a faint cry of horror. "Oh, Mr. Moody! did he hurt Tommie?"

"Hurt him?" Moody repeated, indignant at the interest which she felt in the animal, and the indifference which she exhibited towards the man (as represented by himself). "Hurt him, indeed! Mr. Hardyman bled the brute"——

"Brute?" Isabel reiterated, with flashing eyes. "I know some people, Mr. Moody, who really deserve to be called by that horrid word. If you can't say 'Tommie,' when you speak of him in my presence, be so good as to say 'the dog.'"

Moody yielded with the worst possible grace. "Oh, very well! Mr. Hardyman bled the dog, and brought

him to his senses directly. I am charged to tell you" —— He stopped, as if the message which he was instructed to deliver was in the last degree distasteful to him.

"Well, what were you charged to tell me?"

"I was to say that Mr. Hardyman will give you instructions how to treat the dog for the future."

Isabel hastened to the door, eager to receive her instructions. Moody stopped her before she could open it.

"You are in a great hurry to get to Mr. Hardyman," he remarked.

Isabel looked back at him in surprise. "You said just now that Mr. Hardyman was waiting to tell me how to nurse Tommie."

"Let him wait," Moody rejoined sternly. "When I left him, he was sufficiently occupied in expressing his favourable opinion of you to her Ladyship."

The steward's pale face turned paler still as he said those words. With the arrival of Isabel in Lady Lydiard's house "his time had come"—exactly as the women in the servants' hall had predicted. At last the impenetrable man felt the influence of the sex; at last he knew the passion of love—misplaced, ill-starred, hopeless love, for a woman who was young enough to be his child. He had already spoken to Isabel more than once in terms which told his secret plainly enough. But the smouldering fire of jealousy in the man, fanned into flame by Hardyman, now showed itself for the first time. His looks, even more than his words, would have warned a woman with any knowledge of the natures of men to be careful how she answered him. Young, giddy, and inexperienced, Isabel followed the

flippant impulse of the moment, without a thought of the consequences. "I'm sure it's very kind of Mr. Hardyman to speak favourably of me," she said, with a pert little laugh. "I hope you are not jealous of him, Mr. Moody?"

Moody was in no humour to make allowances for the unbridled gaiety of youth and good spirits. "I hate any man who admires you," he burst out passionately, "let him be who he may!"

Isabel looked at her strange lover with unaffected astonishment. How unlike Mr. Hardyman, who had treated her as a lady from first to last! "What an odd man you are!" she said. "You can't take a joke. I'm sure I didn't mean to offend you."

"You don't offend me—you do worse, you distress me."

Isabel's colour began to rise. The merriment died out of her face; she looked at Moody gravely. "I don't like to be accused of distressing people when I don't deserve it," she said. "I had better leave you. Let me by, if you please."

Having committed one error in offending her, Moody committed another in attempting to make his peace with her. Acting under the fear that she would really leave him, he took her roughly by the arm.

"You are always trying to get away from me," he said. "I wish I knew how to make you like me, Isabel."

"I don't allow you to call me Isabel!" she retorted, struggling to free herself from his hold. "Let go of my arm. You hurt me."

Moody dropped her arm with a bitter sigh. "I

don't know how to deal with you," he said simply. "Have some pity on me!"

If the steward had known anything of women (at Isabel's age) he would never have appealed to her mercy in those plain terms, and at that unpropitious moment. "Pity you?" she repeated contemptuously. "Is that all you have to say to me after hurting my arm? What a bear you are?" She shrugged her shoulders and put her hands coquettishly into the pockets of her apron. That was how she pitied him! His face turned paler and paler—he writhed under it.

"For God's sake, don't turn everything I say to you into ridicule!" he cried. "You know I love you with all my heart and soul. Again and again I have asked you to be my wife—and you laugh at me as if it was a joke. I haven't deserved to be treated in that cruel way. It maddens me—I can't endure it!"

Isabel looked down at the floor, and followed the lines in the pattern of the carpet with the end of her smart little shoe. She could hardly have been farther away from really understanding Moody if he had spoken in Hebrew. She was partly startled, partly puzzled, by the strong emotions which she had unconsciously called into being. "Oh dear me!" she said, "why can't you talk of something else? Why can't we be friends? Excuse me for mentioning it," she went on, looking up at him with a saucy smile, "you are old enough to be my father."

Moody's head sank on his breast. "I own it," he answered humbly. "But there is something to be said for me. Men as old as I am have made good husbands before now. I would devote my whole life to make you happy. There isn't a wish you could form which

I wouldn't be proud to obey. You mustn't reckon me by years. My youth has not been wasted in a profligate life; I can be truer to you and fonder of you than many a younger man. Surely my heart is not quite unworthy of you, when it is all yours. I have lived such a lonely, miserable life—and you might so easily brighten it! You are kind to everybody else, Isabel. Tell me, dear, why are you so hard on *me?*"

His voice trembled as he appealed to her in those simple words. He had taken the right way at last to produce an impression on her. She really felt for him. All that was true and tender in her nature began to rise in her and take his part. Unhappily, he felt too deeply and too strongly to be patient, and to give her time. He completely misinterpreted her silence—completely mistook the motive that made her turn aside for a moment, to gather composure enough to speak to him. "Ah!" he burst out bitterly, turning away on his side, "you have no heart!"

She instantly resented those unjust words. At that moment they wounded her to the quick.

"You know best," she said. "I have no doubt you are right. Remember one thing, however, though I have no heart, I have never encouraged you, Mr. Moody. I have declared over and over again that I could only be your friend. Understand that, for the future, if you please. There are plenty of nice women who will be glad to marry you, I have no doubt. You will always have my best wishes for your welfare. Good morning. Her Ladyship will wonder what has become of me. Be so kind as to let me pass."

Tortured by the passion that consumed him, Moody obstinately kept his place between Isabel and the door.

The unworthy suspicion of her, which had been in his mind all through the interview, now forced its way outwards to expression at last.

"No woman ever used a man as you use me without some reason for it," he said. "You have kept your secret wonderfully well—but, sooner or later, all secrets get found out. I know what is in your mind as well as you know it yourself. You are in love with some other man."

Isabel's face flushed deeply; the defensive pride of her sex was up in arms in an instant. She cast one disdainful look at Moody, without troubling herself to express her contempt in words. "Stand out of my way, Sir!"—that was all she said to him.

"You are in love with some other man," he reiterated passionately. "Deny it if you can!"

"Deny it?" she repeated, with flashing eyes. "What right have you to ask the question? Am I not free to do as I please?"

He stood looking at her, meditating his next words, with a sudden and sinister change to self-restraint. Suppressed rage was in his rigidly set eyes, suppressed rage was in his trembling hand as he raised it emphatically while he spoke his next words.

"I have one thing more to say," he answered, "and then I have done. If I am not your husband, no other man shall be. Look well to it, Isabel Miller. If there *is* another man between us I can tell him this—he shall find it no easy matter to rob me of you!"

She started, and turned pale—but it was only for a moment. The high spirit that was in her rose brightly in her eyes, and faced him without shrinking.

"Threats?" she said, with quiet contempt. "When

you make love, Mr. Moody, you take strange ways of doing it. My conscience is easy. You may try to frighten me, but you will not succeed. When you have recovered your temper I will accept your excuses." She paused, and pointed to the table. "There is the letter that you told me to leave for you when I had sealed it," she went on. "I suppose you have her Ladyship's orders. Isn't it time you began to think of obeying them?"

The contemptuous composure of her tone and manner seemed to act on Moody with crushing effect. Without a word of answer, the unfortunate steward took up the letter from the table. Without a word of answer, he walked mechanically to the great door which opened on the staircase—turned on the threshold to look at Isabel—waited a moment, pale and still—and suddenly left the room.

That silent departure, that hopeless submission, impressed Isabel in spite of herself. The sustaining sense of injury and insult sank, as it were, from under her the moment she was alone. He had not been gone a minute before she began to be sorry for him once more. The interview had taught her nothing. She was neither old enough nor experienced enough to understand the overwhelming revolution produced in a man's character, when he feels the passion of love for the first time in the maturity of his life. If Moody had stolen a kiss at the first opportunity, she would have resented the liberty that he had taken with her; but she would have thoroughly understood him. His terrible earnestness, his overpowering agitation, his abrupt violence—all these evidences of a passion that was a mystery to himself—simply puzzled her. "I'm

sure I didn't wish to hurt his feelings" (such was the form that her reflections took, in her present penitent frame of mind); "but why did he provoke me? It is a shame to tell me that I love some other man—when there is no other man. I declare I begin to hate the men, if they are all like Mr. Moody. I wonder whether he will forgive me when he sees me again? I'm sure I'm willing to forget and forgive on my side—especially if he won't insist on my being fond of him because he is fond of me. Oh, dear! I wish he would come back and shake hands. It's enough to try the patience of a saint to be treated in this way. I wish I was ugly! The ugly ones have a quiet time of it—the men let them be. Mr. Moody! Mr. Moody!" She went out to the landing and called to him softly. There was no answer. He was no longer in the house. She stood still for a moment in silent vexation. "I'll go to Tommie!" she decided. "I'm sure he's the most agreeable company of the two. And—oh, good gracious! —there's Mr. Hardyman waiting to give me my instructions! How do I look, I wonder?"

She consulted the glass once more—gave one or two corrective touches to her hair and her cap—and hastened into the boudoir.

CHAPTER VI.

For a quarter of an hour the drawing-room remained empty. At the end of that time the council in the boudoir broke up. Lady Lydiard led the way back to the drawing-room, followed by Hardyman; Isabel being left to look after the dog. Before the door closed behind him, Hardyman turned round to reiterate his last medical directions—or, in plainer words, to take a last look at Isabel.

"Plenty of water, Miss Isabel, for the dog to lap, and a little bread or biscuit, if he wants something to eat. Nothing more, if you please, till I see him to-morrow."

"Thank you, Sir. I will take the greatest care"——

At that point Lady Lydiard cut short the interchange of instructions and civilities. "Shut the door, if you please, Mr. Hardyman. I feel the draught. Many thanks! I am really at a loss to tell you how gratefully I feel your kindness. But for you, my poor little dog might have been dead by this time."

Hardyman answered, in the quiet, melancholy monotone which was habitual with him, "Your Ladyship need feel no further anxiety about the dog. Only be careful not to overfeed him. He will do very well under Miss Isabel's care. By-the-by, her family name is Miller—is it not? Is she related to the Warwickshire Millers, of Duxborough House?"

Lady Lydiard looked at him with an expression of

satirical surprise. "Mr. Hardyman," she said, "this makes the fourth time you have questioned me about Isabel. You seem to take a great interest in my little companion. Don't make any apologies, pray! You pay Isabel a compliment; and, as I am very fond of her, I am naturally gratified when I find her admired. At the same time," she added, with one of her abrupt transitions of language, "I had my eye on you, and I had my eye on her, when you were talking in the next room; and I don't mean to let you make a fool of the girl. She is not in your line of life, and the sooner you know it the better. You make me laugh when you ask if she is related to gentlefolks. She is the orphan daughter of a chemist in the country. Her relations haven't a penny to bless themselves with; except an old aunt, who lives in a village on two or three hundred a year. I heard of the girl by accident. When she lost her father and mother, her aunt offered to take her. Isabel said, 'No, thank you; I will not be a burden on a relation who has only enough for herself. A girl can earn an honest living if she tries, and I mean to try'—that's what she said. I admired her independence," her Ladyship proceeded, ascending again to the higher regions of thought and expression. "My niece's marriage, just at that time, had left me alone in this great house. I proposed to Isabel to come to me as companion and reader for a few weeks, and to decide for herself whether she liked the life or not. We have never been separated since that time. I could hardly be fonder of her if she was my own daughter; and she returns my affection with all her heart. She has excellent qualities—prudent, cheerful, sweet-tempered; with good sense enough to under-

stand what her place is in the world, as distinguished from her place in my regard. I have taken care, for her own sake, never to leave that part of the question in any doubt. It would be cruel kindness to deceive her as to her future position when she marries. I shall take good care that the man who pays his addresses to her is a man in her rank of life. I know but too well, in the case of one of my own relatives, what miseries unequal marriages bring with them. Excuse me for troubling you at this length on domestic matters. I am very fond of Isabel, and a girl's head is so easily turned. Now you know what her position really is, you will also know what limits there must be to the expression of your interest in her. I am sure we understand each other; and I say no more."

Hardyman listened to this long harangue with the immovable gravity which was part of his character—except when Isabel had taken him by surprise. When her Ladyship gave him the opportunity of speaking on his side, he had very little to say, and that little did not suggest that he had greatly profited by what he had heard. His mind had been full of Isabel when Lady Lydiard began; and it remained just as full of her, in just the same way, when Lady Lydiard had done.

"Yes," he remarked, quietly, "Miss Isabel is an uncommonly nice girl, as you say. Very pretty, and such frank, unaffected manners. I don't deny that I feel an interest in her. The young ladies one meets in society are not much to my taste. Miss Isabel is my taste."

Lady Lydiard's face assumed a look of blank dis-

may. "I am afraid I have failed to convey my exact meaning to you," she said.

Hardyman gravely declared that he understood her perfectly. "Perfectly!" he repeated, with his impenetrable obstinacy. "Your Ladyship exactly expresses my opinion of Miss Isabel. Prudent, and cheerful, and sweet-tempered, as you say—all the qualities in a woman that I admire. With good looks, too—of course with good looks. She will be a perfect treasure (as you remarked just now) to the man who marries her. I may claim to know something about it. I have twice narrowly escaped being married myself; and, though I can't exactly explain it, I 'm all the harder to please in consequence. Miss Isabel pleases me. I think I have said that before. Pardon me for saying it again. I 'll call to-morrow morning and look at the dog, as early as eleven o'clock, if you will allow me. Later in the day I must be off to France to attend a sale of horses. Glad to have been of any use to your Ladyship, I am sure. Good morning."

Lady Lydiard let him go, wisely resigning any further attempt to establish an understanding between her visitor and herself.

"He is either a person of very limited intelligence when he is away from his stables," she thought, "or he deliberately declines to take a plain hint when it is given to him. I can't drop his acquaintance, on Tommie's account. The only other alternative is to keep Isabel out of his way. My good little girl shall not drift into a false position while I am living to look after her. When Mr. Hardyman calls to-morrow she shall be out on an errand. When he calls on his return she shall be upstairs with a headache. And if

he tries it again she shall be away at my house in the country. If he makes any remarks on her absence,—well, he will find that I can be just as dull of understanding as he is when the occasion calls for it."

Having arrived at this satisfactory solution of the difficulty, Lady Lydiard became conscious of an irresistible impulse to summon Isabel to her presence and caress her. In the nature of a warm-hearted woman, this was only the inevitable reaction which followed the subsidence of anxiety about the girl, after her own resolution had set that anxiety at rest. She threw open the door and made one of her sudden appearances in the boudoir. Even in the fervent outpouring of her affection, there was still the inherent abruptness of manner which so strongly marked Lady Lydiard's character in all the relations of life.

"Did I give you a kiss, this morning?" she asked, when Isabel rose to receive her.

"Yes, my Lady," said the girl, with her charming smile.

"Come, then, and give me a kiss in return. Do you love me? Very well, then, treat me like your mother. Never mind 'my Lady' this time. Give me a good hug!"

Something in those homely words, or something perhaps in the look that accompanied them, touched sympathies in Isabel which seldom showed themselves on the surface. Her smiling lips trembled, the bright tears rose in her eyes. "You are too good to me," she murmured, with her head on Lady Lydiard's bosom. "How can I ever love you enough in return?"

Lady Lydiard patted the pretty head that rested on her with such filial tenderness. "There! there!"

she said. "Go back and play with Tommie, my dear. We may be as fond of each other as we like; but we mustn't cry. God bless you! Go away—go away!"

She turned aside quickly; her own eyes were moistening, and it was part of her character to be reluctant to let Isabel see it. "Why have I made a fool of myself?" she wondered, as she approached the drawing-room door. "It doesn't matter. I am all the better for it. Odd, that Mr. Hardyman should have made me feel fonder of Isabel than ever!"

With those reflections, she re-entered the drawing-room—and suddenly checked herself with a start. "Good Heavens!" she exclaimed irritably, "how you frightened me! Why was I not told you were here?"

Having left the drawing-room in a state of solitude, Lady Lydiard on her return found herself suddenly confronted with a gentleman, mysteriously planted on the hearth-rug in her absence. The new visitor may be rightly described as a grey man. He had grey hair, eyebrows, and whiskers; he wore a grey coat, waistcoat, and trousers, and grey gloves. For the rest, his appearance was eminently suggestive of wealth and respectability—and, in this case, appearances were really to be trusted. The grey man was no other than Lady Lydiard's legal adviser, Mr. Troy.

"I regret, my Lady, that I should have been so unfortunate as to startle you," he said, with a certain underlying embarrassment in his manner. "I had the honour of sending word by Mr. Moody that I would call at this hour, on some matters of business connected with your Ladyship's house property. I presumed that you expected to find me here, waiting your pleasure"——

Thus far, Lady Lydiard had listened to her legal adviser, fixing her eyes on his face in her usually frank, straightforward way. She now stopped him in the middle of a sentence with a change of expression in her own face, which was undisguisedly a change to alarm.

"Don't apologise, Mr. Troy," she said. "I am to blame for forgetting your appointment, and for not keeping my nerves under proper control." She paused for a moment, and took a seat before she said her next words. "May I ask," she resumed, "if there is something unpleasant in the business that brings you here?"

"Nothing whatever, my Lady; mere formalities, which can wait till to-morrow or next day, if you wish it."

Lady Lydiard's fingers drummed impatiently on the table. "You have known me long enough, Mr. Troy, to know that I cannot endure suspense. You *have* something unpleasant to tell me."

The lawyer respectfully remonstrated. "Really, Lady Lydiard!"——he began.

"It won't do, Mr. Troy! I know how you look at me on ordinary occasions, and I see how you look at me now. You are a very clever lawyer; but, happily for the interests that I commit to your charge, you are also a thoroughly honest man. After twenty years' experience of you, you can't deceive *me*. You bring me bad news. Speak at once, Sir, and speak plainly."

Mr. Troy yielded—inch by inch, as it were. "I bring news which, I fear, may annoy your Ladyship." He paused and advanced another inch. "It is news which I only became acquainted with myself on enter-

ing this house." He waited again, and made another advance. "I happened to meet your Ladyship's steward, Mr. Moody, in the hall"——

"Where is he?" Lady Lydiard interposed, angrily. "I can make *him* speak out, and I will. Send him here instantly."

The lawyer made a last effort to hold off the coming disclosure a little longer. "Mr. Moody will be here directly," he said. "Mr. Moody requested me to prepare your Ladyship"——

"Will you ring the bell, Mr. Troy, or must I?"

Moody had evidently been waiting outside while the lawyer spoke for him. He saved Mr. Troy the trouble of ringing the bell by presenting himself in the drawing-room. Lady Lydiard's eyes searched his face as he approached. Her bright complexion faded suddenly. Not a word more passed her lips. She looked, and waited.

In silence on his side, Moody laid an open sheet of paper on the table. The paper quivered in his trembling hand.

Lady Lydiard recovered herself first. "Is that for me?" she asked.

"Yes, my Lady."

She took up the paper without an instant's hesitation. Both the men watched her anxiously as she read it.

The handwriting was strange to her. The words were these:—

"I hereby certify that the bearer of these lines, Robert Moody by name, has presented to me the letter with which he was charged, addressed to myself with the seal intact. I regret to add that there is, to say

the least of it, some mistake. The inclosure referred to by the anonymous writer of the letter, who signs 'a friend in need,' has not reached me. No five hundred pound bank-note was in the letter when I opened it. My wife was present when I broke the seal, and can certify to this statement if necessary. Not knowing who my charitable correspondent is (Mr. Moody being forbidden to give me any information), I can only take this means of stating the case exactly as it stands, and hold myself at the disposal of the writer of the letter. My private address is at the head of the page.—Samuel Bradstock, Rector, St. Anne's, Deansbury, London."

Lady Lydiard dropped the paper on the table. For the moment, plainly as the Rector's statement was expressed, she appeared to be incapable of understanding it. "What, in God's name, does this mean?" she asked.

The lawyer and the steward looked at each other. Which of the two was entitled to speak first? Lady Lydiard gave them no time to decide. "Moody," she said, sternly, "You took charge of the letter—I look to you for an explanation."

Moody's dark eyes flashed. He answered Lady Lydiard, without caring to conceal that he resented the tone in which she had spoken to him.

"I undertook to deliver the letter at its address," he said. "I found it, sealed, on the table. Your Ladyship has the clergyman's written testimony that I handed it to him with the seal unbroken. I have done my duty; and I have no explanation to offer."

Before Lady Lydiard could speak again, Mr. Troy discreetly interfered. He saw plainly that his ex-

perience was required to lead the investigation in the right direction.

"Pardon me, my Lady," he said, with that happy mixture of the positive and the polite in his manner, of which lawyers alone possess the secret. "There is only one way of arriving at the truth in painful matters of this sort. We must begin at the beginning. May I venture to ask your Ladyship a question?"

Lady Lydiard felt the composing influence of Mr. Troy. "I am at your disposal, Sir," she said quietly.

"Are you absolutely certain that you inclosed the bank-note in the letter?" the lawyer asked.

"I certainly believe I inclosed it," Lady Lydiard answered. "But I was so alarmed at the time by the sudden illness of my dog, that I do not feel justified in speaking positively."

"Was anybody in the room with your Ladyship when you put the inclosure in the letter—as you believe?"

"*I* was in the room," said Moody. "I can swear that I saw her Ladyship put the bank-note in the letter, and the letter in the envelope."

"And seal the envelope?" asked Mr. Troy.

"No, Sir. Her Ladyship was called away into the next room to the dog, before she could seal the envelope."

Mr. Troy addressed himself once more to Lady Lydiard. "Did your Ladyship take the letter into the next room with you?"

"I was too much alarmed to think of it, Mr. Troy. I left it here, on the table."

"With the envelope open?"

"Yes."

"How long were you absent in the other room?"

"Half an hour or more."

"Ha!" said Mr. Troy to himself. "This complicates it a little. He reflected for a while, and then turned again to Moody. "Did any of the servants know of this bank-note being in her Ladyship's possession?"

"Not one of them," Moody answered.

"Do you suspect any of the servants?"

"Certainly not, Sir?"

"Are there any workmen employed in the house?"

"No, Sir."

"Do you know of any persons who had access to the room while Lady Lydiard was absent from it?"

"Two visitors called, Sir."

"Who were they?"

"Her Ladyship's nephew, Mr. Felix Sweetsir, and the Honourable Alfred Hardyman."

Mr. Troy shook his head irritably. "I am not speaking of gentlemen of high position and repute," he said. "It's absurd even to mention Mr. Sweetsir and Mr. Hardyman. My question related to strangers who might have obtained access to the drawing-room —people calling, with her Ladyship's sanction, for subscriptions, for instance; or people calling with articles of dress or ornament to be submitted to her Ladyship's inspection."

"No such persons came to the house, to my knowledge," Moody answered.

Mr. Troy suspended the investigation, and took a turn thoughtfully in the room. The theory on which his inquiries had proceeded thus far had failed to produce any results. His experience warned him to

waste no more time on it, and to return to the starting point of the investigation—in other words, to the letter. Shifting his point of view, he turned again to Lady Lydiard, and tried his questions in a new direction.

"Mr. Moody mentioned just now," he said, "that your Ladyship was called into the next room before you could seal your letter. On your return to this room, did you seal the letter?"

"I was busy with the dog," Lady Lydiard answered. "Isabel Miller was of no use in the boudoir, and I told her to seal it for me."

Mr. Troy started. The new direction in which he was pushing his inquiries began to look like the right direction already. "Miss Isabel Miller," he proceeded, "has been a resident under your Ladyship's roof for some little time, I believe?"

"For nearly two years, Mr. Troy."

"As your Ladyship's companion and reader?"

"As my adopted daughter," her Ladyship answered, with marked emphasis.

Wise Mr. Troy rightly interpreted the emphasis as a warning to him to suspend the examination of her Ladyship, and to address to Mr. Moody the far more serious questions which were now to come.

"Did anyone give you the letter before you left the house with it?" he said to the steward. "Or did you take it, yourself?"

"I took it myself, from the table here."

"Was it sealed?"

"Yes."

"Was anybody present when you took the letter from the table?"

"Miss Isabel was present."

"Did you find her alone in the room?"

"Yes, Sir."

Lady Lydiard opened her lips to speak, and checked herself. Mr. Troy, having cleared the ground before him, put the fatal question.

"Mr. Moody," he said, "when Miss Isabel was instructed to seal the letter, did she know that a banknote was inclosed in it?"

Instead of replying, Robert drew back from the lawyer with a look of horror. Lady Lydiard started to her feet, and checked herself again, on the point of speaking.

"Answer him, Moody," she said, putting a strong constraint on herself.

Robert answered very unwillingly. "I took the liberty of reminding her Ladyship that she had left her letter unsealed," he said. "And I mentioned as my excuse for speaking"—he stopped, and corrected himself—"*I believe* I mentioned that a valuable inclosure was in the letter."

"You believe?" Mr. Troy repeated. "Can't you speak more positively than that?"

"*I* can speak positively," said Lady Lydiard, with her eyes on the lawyer. "Moody did mention the inclosure in the letter—in Isabel Miller's hearing as well as in mine." She paused, steadily controlling herself. "And what of that, Mr. Troy?" she added, very quietly and firmly.

Mr. Troy answered quietly and firmly, on his side. "I am surprised that your Ladyship should ask the question," he said.

"I persist in repeating the question," Lady Lydiard

rejoined. "I say that Isabel Miller knew of the inclosure in my letter—and I ask, What of that?"

"And I answer," retorted the impenetrable lawyer, "that the suspicion of theft rests on your ladyship's adopted daughter, and on nobody else."

"It's false!" cried Robert, with a burst of honest indignation. "I wish to God I had never said a word to you about the loss of the bank-note! Oh, my Lady! my Lady! don't let him distress you! What does *he* know about it?"

"Hush!" said Lady Lydiard. "Control yourself, and hear what he has to say." She rested her hand on Moody's shoulder, partly to encourage him, partly to support herself; and, fixing her eyes again on Mr. Troy, repeated his last words, "'Suspicion rests on my adopted daughter, and on nobody else.' Why on nobody else?"

"Is your ladyship prepared to suspect the Rector of St. Anne's of embezzlement, or your own relatives and equals of theft?" Mr. Troy asked. "Does a shadow of doubt rest on the servants? Not if Mr. Moody's evidence is to be believed. Who, to our certain knowledge, had access to the letter while it was unsealed? Who was alone in the room with it? And who knew of the inclosure in it? I leave the answer to your Ladyship."

"Isabel Miller is as incapable of an act of theft as I am. There is my answer, Mr. Troy!"

The lawyer bowed resignedly, and advanced to the door.

"Am I to take your Ladyship's generous assertion as finally disposing of the question of the lost bank-note?" he inquired.

Lady Lydiard met the challenge without shrinking from it.

"No!" she said. "The loss of the bank-note is known out of my house. Other persons may suspect this innocent girl as you suspect her. It is due to Isabel's reputation — her unstained reputation, Mr. Troy!—that she should know what has happened, and should have an opportunity of defending herself. She is in the next room, Moody. Bring her here."

Robert's courage failed him: he trembled at the bare idea of exposing Isabel to the terrible ordeal that awaited her. "Oh, my Lady!" he pleaded, "think again before you tell the poor girl that she is suspected of theft. Keep it a secret from her—the shame of it will break her heart!"

"Keep it a secret," said Lady Lydiard, "when the Rector and the Rector's wife both know of it! Do you think they will let the matter rest where it is, even if I could consent to hush it up? I must write to them; and I can't write anonymously after what has happened. Put yourself in Isabel's place, and tell me if you would thank the person who knew you to be innocently exposed to a disgraceful suspicion, and who concealed it from you? Go, Moody! The longer you delay, the harder it will be."

With his head sunk on his breast, with anguish written in every line of his face, Moody obeyed. Passing slowly down the short passage which connected the two rooms, and still shrinking from the duty that had been imposed on him, he paused, looking through the curtains which hung over the entrance to the boudoir.

CHAPTER VII.

THE sight that met Moody's view wrung him to the heart.

Isabel and the dog were at play together. Among the varied accomplishments possessed by Tommie, the capacity to take his part at a game of hide-and-seek was one. His playfellow for the time being put a shawl or a handkerchief over his head, so as to prevent him from seeing, and then hid among the furniture a pocket-book, or a cigar-case, or a purse, or anything else that happened to be at hand, leaving the dog to find it, with his keen sense of smell to guide him. Doubly relieved by the fit and the bleeding, Tommie's spirits had revived; and he and Isabel had just begun their game when Moody looked into the room, charged with his terrible errand. "You're burning, Tommie, you're burning!" cried the girl, laughing and clapping her hands. The next moment she happened to look round and saw Moody through the parted curtains. His face warned her instantly that something serious had happened. She advanced a few steps, her eyes resting on him in silent alarm. He was himself too painfully agitated to speak. Not a word was exchanged between Lady Lydiard and Mr. Troy in the next room. In the complete stillness that prevailed, the dog was heard sniffing and fidgetting about the furniture. Robert took Isabel by the hand and led her into the drawing-room. "For God's sake, spare

her, my Lady!" he whispered. The lawyer heard him. "No," said Mr. Troy. "Be merciful, and tell her the truth!"

He spoke to a woman who stood in no need of his advice. The inherent nobility in Lady Lydiard's nature was roused: her great heart offered itself patiently to any sorrow, to any sacrifice.

Putting her arm round Isabel—half caressing her, half supporting her—Lady Lydiard accepted the whole responsibility and told the whole truth.

Reeling under the first shock, the poor girl recovered herself with admirable courage. She raised her head, and eyed the lawyer without uttering a word. In its artless consciousness of innocence the look was nothing less than sublime. Addressing herself to Mr. Troy, Lady Lydiard pointed to Isabel. "Do you see guilt there?" she asked.

Mr. Troy made no answer. In the melancholy experience of humanity to which his profession condemned him, he had seen conscious guilt assume the face of innocence, and helpless innocence admit the disguise of guilt: the keenest observation, in either case, failing completely to detect the truth. Lady Lydiard misinterpreted his silence as expressing the sullen self-assertion of a heartless man. She turned from him, in contempt, and held out her hand to Isabel.

"Mr. Troy is not satisfied yet," she said, bitterly. "My love, take my hand, and look me in the face as your equal; I know no difference of rank at such a time as this. Before God, who hears you, are you innocent of the theft of the bank-note?"

"Before God, who hears me," Isabel answered, "I am innocent."

Lady Lydiard looked once more at the lawyer, and waited to hear if he believed *that*.

Mr. Troy took refuge in dumb diplomacy—he made a low bow. It might have meant that he believed Isabel, or it might have meant that he modestly withdrew his own opinion into the background. Lady Lydiard did not condescend to inquire what it meant.

"The sooner we bring this painful scene to an end the better," she said. "I shall be glad to avail myself of your professional assistance, Mr. Troy, within certain limits. Outside of my house, I beg that you will spare no trouble in tracing the lost money to the person who has really stolen it. Inside of my house, I must positively request that the disappearance of the note may never be alluded to, in any way whatever, until your inquiries have been successful in discovering the thief. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Tollmidge and her family must not be sufferers by my loss: I shall pay the money again." She paused, and pressed Isabel's hand with affectionate fervour. "My child," she said, "one last word to you, and I have done. You remain here, with my trust in you, and my love for you, absolutely unshaken. You are dearer to me than ever. Never forget that!"

Isabel bent her head, and kissed the kind hand that still held her's. The high spirit that was in her, inspired by Lady Lydiard's example, rose equal to the dreadful situation in which she was placed.

"No, my Lady," she said, calmly and sadly; "it cannot be. What this gentleman has said of me is not to be denied—the appearances are against me. The letter was open, and I was alone in the room with it, and Mr. Moody told me that a valuable inclosure was

inside it. Dear and kind mistress! I am not fit to be a member of your household, I am not worthy to live with the honest people who serve you, while my innocence is in doubt. It is enough for me now that *you* don't doubt it. I can wait patiently, after that, for the day that gives me back my good name. Oh, my Lady, don't cry about it! Pray, pray don't cry!"

Lady Lydiard's self-control failed her for the first time. Isabel's courage had made Isabel dearer to her than ever. She sank into a chair, and covered her face with her handkerchief. Mr. Troy turned aside abruptly, and examined a Japanese vase, without any idea in his mind of what he was looking at. Lady Lydiard had gravely misjudged him in believing him to be a heartless man.

Isabel followed the lawyer, and touched him gently on the arm to rouse his attention.

"I have one relation living, Sir—an aunt—who will receive me if I go to her," she said, simply. "Is there any harm in my going? Lady Lydiard will give you the address when you want me. Spare her Ladyship, Sir, all the pain and trouble that you can."

At last the heart that was in Mr. Troy asserted itself. "You are a fine creature!" he said, with a burst of enthusiasm. "I agree with Lady Lydiard — I believe you are innocent, too; and I will leave no effort untried to find the proof of it." He turned aside again, and had another look at the Japanese vase.

As the lawyer withdrew himself from observation, Moody approached Isabel.

Thus far he had stood apart, watching her and listening to her in silence. Not a look that had crossed her face, not a word that had fallen from her, had

escaped him. Unconsciously on her side, unconsciously on his side, she now wrought on his nature with a purifying and ennobling influence which animated it with a new life. All that had been selfish and violent in his passion for her left him to return no more. The immeasurable devotion which he laid at her feet, in the days that were yet to come—the unyielding courage which cheerfully accepted the sacrifice of himself when events demanded it at a later period of his life—struck root in him now. Without attempting to conceal the tears that were falling fast over his cheeks—striving vainly to express those new thoughts in him that were beyond the reach of words—he stood before her the truest friend and servant that ever woman had. "Oh, my dear! my heart is heavy for you. Take me to serve you and help you. Her Ladyship's kindness will permit it, I am sure."

He could say no more. In those simple words the cry of his heart reached her. "Forgive me, Robert," she answered, gratefully, "if I said anything to pain you when we spoke together a little while since. I didn't mean it." She gave him her hand, and looked timidly over her shoulder at Lady Lydiard. "Let me go!" she said, in low, broken tones, "Let me go!"

Mr. Troy heard her, and stepped forward to interfere before Lady Lydiard could speak. The man had recovered his self-control; the lawyer took his place again on the scene.

"You must not leave us, my dear," he said to Isabel, "until I have put a question to Mr. Moody in which you are interested. Do you happen to have the number of the lost bank-note?" he asked, turning to the steward.

Moody produced his slip of paper with the number on it. Mr. Troy made two copies of it before he returned the paper. One copy he put in his pocket, the other he handed to Isabel.

"Keep it carefully," he said. "Neither you nor I know how soon it may be of use to you."

Receiving the copy from him, she felt mechanically in her apron for her pocket-book. She had used it, in playing with the dog, as an object to hide from him; but she had suffered, and was still suffering, too keenly to be capable of the effort of remembrance. Moody, eager to help her even in the most trifling thing, guessed what had happened. "You were playing with Tommie," he said; "is it in the next room?"

The dog heard his name pronounced through the open door. The next moment he trotted into the drawing-room with Isabel's pocket-book in his mouth. He was a strong, well-grown Scotch terrier of the largest size, with bright, intelligent eyes, and a coat of thick curling white hair, diversified by two light brown patches on his back. As he reached the middle of the room, and looked from one to another of the persons present, the fine sympathy of his race told him that there was trouble among his human friends. His tail dropped; he whined softly as he approached Isabel, and laid her pocket-book at her feet.

She knelt as she picked up the pocket-book, and raised her playfellow of happier days to take her leave of him. As the dog put his paws on her shoulders, returning her caress, her first tears fell. "Foolish of me," she said, faintly, "to cry over a dog. I can't help it. Good-by, Tommie!"

Putting him away from her gently, she walked to-

wards the door. The dog instantly followed. She put him away from her, for the second time, and left him. He was not to be denied; he followed her again, and took her skirt of her dress in his teeth, as if to hold her back. Robert forced the dog, growling and resisting with all his might, to let go of the dress. "Don't be rough with him," said Isabel. "Put him on her Ladyship's lap; he will be quieter there." Robert obeyed. He whispered to Lady Lydiard as she received the dog: she seemed to be still incapable of speaking—she bowed her head in silent assent. Robert hurried back to Isabel before she had passed the door. "Not alone!" he said, entreatingly. "Her Ladyship permits it, Isabel. Let me see you safe to your aunt's house."

Isabel looked at him, felt for him, and yielded.

"Yes," she answered, softly; "to make amends for what I said to you when I was thoughtless and happy!" She waited a little to compose herself before she spoke her few farewell words to Lady Lydiard. "Good-by, my Lady. Your kindness has not been thrown away on an ungrateful girl. I love you, and thank you, with all my heart."

Lady Lydiard rose, placing the dog on the chair as she left it. She seemed to have grown older by years, instead of by minutes, in the short interval that had passed since she had hidden her face from view. "I can't bear it!" she cried, in husky, broken tones. "Isabel! Isabel! I forbid you to leave me!"

But one person present could venture to resist her. That person was Mr. Troy—and Mr. Troy knew it.

"Control yourself," he said to her in a whisper. "The girl is doing what is best and most becoming in

her position—and is doing it with a patience and courage wonderful to see. She places herself under the protection of her nearest relative until her character is vindicated and her position in your house is once more beyond a doubt. Is this a time to throw obstacles in her way? Be worthy of yourself, Lady Lydiard—and think of the day when she will return to you without the breath of a suspicion to rest on her!"

There was no disputing with him—he was too plainly in the right. Lady Lydiard submitted; she concealed the torture that her own resolution inflicted on her with an endurance which was, indeed, worthy of herself. Taking Isabel in her arms she kissed her in a passion of sorrow and love. "My poor dear! My own sweet girl! don't suppose that this is a parting kiss! I shall see you again—often and often I shall see you again at your aunt's!" At a sign from Mr. Troy, Robert took Isabel's arm in his and led her away. Tommie, watching her from his chair, lifted his little white muzzle as his playfellow looked back on passing the doorway. The long, melancholy farewell howl of the dog was the last sound Isabel Miller heard as she left the house.

PART THE SECOND.

THE DISCOVERY.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the day after Isabel left Lady Lydiard's house Mr. Troy set forth for the Head Office in Whitehall to consult the police on the question of the missing money. He had previously sent information of the robbery to the Bank of England, and had also advertised the loss in the daily newspapers.

The air was so pleasant, and the sun was so bright, that he determined on proceeding to his destination on foot. He was hardly out of sight of his own offices when he was overtaken by a friend, who was also walking in the direction of Whitehall. This gentleman was a person of considerable worldly wisdom and experience; he had been officially associated with cases of striking and notorious crime, in which Government had lent its assistance to discover and punish the criminals. The opinion of a person in this position might be of the greatest value to Mr. Troy, whose practice as a solicitor had thus far never brought him into collision with thieves and mysteries. He accordingly decided, in Isabel's interests, on confiding to his friend the nature of his errand to the police. Concealing the names, but concealing nothing else, he

described what had happened on the previous day at Lady Lydiard's house, and then put the question plainly to his companion,

"What would you do in my place?"

"In your place," his friend answered quietly, "I should not waste time and money in consulting the police."

"Not consult the police!" exclaimed Mr. Troy in amazement. "Surely, I have not made myself understood? I am going to the Head Office; and I have got a letter of introduction to the chief inspector in the detective department. I am afraid I omitted to mention that?"

"It doesn't make any difference," proceeded the other, as coolly as ever. "You have asked for my advice, and I give you my advice. Tear up your letter of introduction and don't stir a step farther in the direction of Whitehall."

Mr. Troy began to understand. "You don't believe in the detective police?" he said.

"Who *can* believe in them, who reads the newspapers and remembers what he reads?" his friend rejoined. "Fortunately for the detective department, the public in general forgets what it reads. Go to your club, and look at the criminal history of our own time, recorded in the newspapers. Every crime is more or less a mystery. You will see that the mysteries which the police discover are, almost without exception, mysteries made penetrable by the commonest capacity, through the extraordinary stupidity exhibited in the means taken to hide the crime. On the other hand, let the guilty man or woman be a resolute and intelligent person, capable of setting his (or her) wits fairly

against the wits of the police—in other words, let the mystery really *be* a mystery—and cite me a case if you can (a really difficult and perplexing case) in which the criminal has not escaped. Mind! I don't charge the police with neglecting their work. No doubt they do their best, and take the greatest pains in following the routine to which they have been trained. It is their misfortune, not their fault, that there is no man of superior intelligence among them—I mean no man who is capable, in great emergencies, of placing himself above conventional methods, and following a new way of his own. There have been such men in the police—men naturally endowed with that faculty of mental analysis which can decompose a mystery, resolve it into its component parts, and find the clue at the bottom, no matter how remote from ordinary observation it may be. But those men have died, or have retired. One of them would have been invaluable to you in the case you have just mentioned to me. As things are, unless you are wrong in believing in the young lady's innocence, the person who has stolen that banknote will be no easy person to find. In my opinion, there is only one man now in London who is likely to be of the slightest assistance to you—and he is not in the police."

"Who is he?" asked Mr. Troy.

"An old rogue, who was once in your branch of the legal profession," the friend answered. "You may, perhaps, remember the man: they call him 'Old Sharon.'"

"What! The scoundrel who was struck off the Roll of Attorneys, years since? Is he still alive?"

"Alive and prospering. He lives in a court or a

lane running out of Long-acre, and he offers advice to persons interested in recovering missing objects of any sort. Whether you have lost your wife, or lost your cigar-case, Old Sharon is equally useful to you. He has an inbred capacity for reading the riddle the right way in cases of mystery, great or small. In short, he possesses exactly that analytical faculty to which I alluded just now. I have his address at my office, if you think it worth while to try him."

"Who can trust such a man?" Mr. Troy objected. "He would be sure to deceive me."

"You are entirely mistaken. Since he was struck off the Rolls old Sharon has discovered that the straight way is, on the whole, the best way, even in a man's own interests. His consultation fee is a guinea; and he gives a signed estimate beforehand for any supplementary expenses that may follow. I can tell you (this is of course strictly between ourselves) that the authorities at my office took his advice in a Government case that puzzled the police. We approached him, of course, through persons who were to be trusted to represent us, without betraying the source from which their instructions were derived; and we found the old rascal's advice well worth paying for. It is quite likely that he may not succeed so well in your case. Try the police, by all means; and, if they fail, why, there is Sharon as a last resource."

This arrangement commended itself to Mr. Troy's professional caution. He went on to Whitehall, and he tried the detective police. They at once adopted the obvious conclusion to persons of ordinary capacity —the conclusion that Isabel was the thief.

Acting on this conviction, the authorities sent an

experienced woman from the office to Lady Lydiard's house, to examine the poor girl's clothes and ornaments before they were packed up and sent after her to her aunt's. The search led to nothing. The only objects of any value that were discovered had been presents from Lady Lydiard. No jewellers' or milliners' bills were among the papers found in her desk. Not a sign of secret extravagance in dress was to be seen anywhere. Defeated so far, the police proposed next to have Isabel privately watched. There might be a prodigal lover somewhere in the background, with ruin staring him in the face unless he could raise five hundred pounds. Lady Lydiard (who had only consented to the search under stress of persuasive argument from Mr. Troy) resented this ingenious idea as an insult. She declared that if Isabel was watched the girl should know of it instantly from her own lips. The police listened with perfect resignation and decorum, and politely shifted their ground. A certain suspicion (they remarked) always rested in cases of this sort on the servants. Would her Ladyship object to private inquiries into the characters and proceedings of the servants? Her Ladyship instantly objected, in the most positive terms. Thereupon the "Inspector" asked for a minute's private conversation with Mr. Troy. "The thief is certainly a member of Lady Lydiard's household," this functionary remarked, in his politely-positive way. "If her Ladyship persists in refusing to let us make the necessary inquiries, our hands are tied, and the case comes to an end through no fault of ours. If her Ladyship changes her mind, perhaps you will drop me a line, Sir, to that effect. Good morning."

So the experiment of consulting the police came to an untimely end. The one result obtained was the expression of purblind opinion by the authorities of the detective department, which pointed at Isabel, or at one of the servants, as the undiscovered thief. Thinking the matter over in the retirement of his own office—and not forgetting his promise to Isabel to leave no means untried of establishing her innocence—Mr. Troy could see but one alternative left to him. He took up his pen, and wrote to his friend at the Government office. There was nothing for it now but to run the risk, and try old Sharon.

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day, Mr. Troy (taking Robert Moody with him as a valuable witness) rang the bell at the mean and dirty lodging-house in which old Sharon received the clients who stood in need of his advice.

They were led up stairs to a back room on the second floor of the house. Entering the room, they discovered through a thick cloud of tobacco smoke, a small, fat, baldheaded, dirty, old man, in an arm-chair, robed in a tattered flannel dressing-gown, with a short pipe in his mouth, a pug-dog on his lap, and a French novel in his hands.

"Is it business?" asked old Sharon, speaking in a hoarse, asthmatical voice, and fixing a pair of bright, shameless black eyes attentively on the two visitors.

"It *is* business," Mr. Troy answered, looking at the

old rogue who had disgraced an honourable profession, as he might have looked at a reptile which had just risen rampant at his feet. "What is your fee for a consultation?"

"You give me a guinea, and I'll give you half an hour." With this reply old Sharon held out his unwashed hand across the rickety ink-splashed table at which he was sitting.

Mr. Troy would not have touched him with the tips of his own fingers for a thousand pounds. He laid the guinea on the table.

Old Sharon burst into a fierce laugh—a laugh strangely accompanied by a frowning contraction of his eyebrows, and a frightful exhibition of the whole inside of his mouth. "I'm not clean enough for you—eh?" he said, with an appearance of being very much amused. "There's a dirty old man described in this book that is a little like me." He held up his French novel. "Have you read it? A capital story—well put together. Ah, you haven't read it? You have got a pleasure to come. I say, do you mind tobacco-smoke? I think faster while I smoke—that's all."

Mr. Troy's respectable hand waved a silent permission to smoke, given under dignified protest.

"All right," said old Sharon. "Now get on."

He laid himself back in his chair, and puffed out his smoke, with eyes lazily half closed, like the eyes of the pug-dog on his lap. At that moment,. indeed, there was a curious resemblance between the two. They both seemed to be preparing themselves, in the same idle way, for the same comfortable nap.

Mr. Troy stated the circumstances under which the five-hundred-pound note had disappeared, in clear and

consecutive narrative. When he had done, Old Sharon suddenly opened his eyes. The pug-dog suddenly opened his eyes. Old Sharon looked hard at Mr. Troy. The pug looked hard at Mr. Troy. Old Sharon spoke. The pug growled.

"I know who you are—you're a lawyer. Don't be alarmed! I never saw you before; and I don't know your name. What I do know, is a lawyer's statement of facts when I hear it. Who's this?" Old Sharon looked inquisitively at Moody as he put the question.

Mr. Troy introduced Moody as a competent witness, thoroughly acquainted with the circumstances, and ready and willing to answer any questions relating to them. Old Sharon waited a little, smoking hard and thinking hard. "Now, then!" he burst out in his fiercely sudden way. "I'm going to get to the root of the matter."

He leaned forward with his elbows on the table, and began his examination of Moody. Heartily as Mr. Troy despised and disliked the old rogue, he listened with astonishment and admiration—literally extorted from him by the marvellous ability with which the questions were adapted to the end in view. In a quarter of an hour Old Sharon had extracted from the witness everything, literally everything down to the smallest detail, that Moody could tell him. Having now, in his own phrase, "got to the root of the matter," he relit his pipe with a grunt of satisfaction, and laid himself back again in his old arm-chair.

"Well?" said Mr. Troy. "Have you formed your opinion?"

"Yes; I've formed my opinion."

"What is it?"

Instead of replying, Old Sharon winked confidentially at Mr. Troy, and put a question on his side.

"I say! is a ten-pound note much of an object to you?"

"It depends," answered Mr. Troy, "on what the money is wanted for."

"Look here," said Old Sharon; "I can give you an opinion for your guinea; but, mind this, it's an opinion founded on hearsay—and you know as a lawyer what that is worth. Venture your ten pounds—in plain English, pay me for my time and trouble in a baffling and difficult case—and I'll give you an opinion founded on my own experience."

"Explain yourself a little more clearly," said Mr. Troy. "What do you guarantee to tell us if we venture the ten pounds?"

"I guarantee to name the person, or the persons, on whom the suspicion really rests. And if you employ me after that, I guarantee (before you pay me a halfpenny more) to prove that I am right by laying my hand on the thief."

"Let us have the guinea opinion first," said Mr. Troy.

Old Sharon made another frightful exhibition of the whole inside of his mouth; his laugh was louder and fiercer than ever. "I like you!" he said to Mr. Troy, "you are so devilish fond of your money. Lord! how rich you must be! Now listen. Here's the guinea opinion:—Suspect, in this case, the very last person on whom suspicion could possibly fall."

Moody, listening attentively, started, and changed

colour at those last words. Mr. Troy looked thoroughly disappointed, and made no attempt to conceal it.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"All?" retorted the cynical vagabond. "You're a pretty lawyer! What more can I say, when I don't know for certain whether the witness who has given me my information has misled me or not? Have I spoken to the girl, and formed my own opinion? No! Have I been introduced among the servants (as errand boy, or to clean the boots and shoes, or what not), and have I formed my own judgment of *them?* No! I take your opinions for granted, and I tell you how I should set to work myself if they were *my* opinions too—and that's a guinea's-worth, a devilish good guinea's-worth to a rich man like you!"

Old Sharon's logic produced a certain effect on Mr. Troy, in spite of himself. It was smartly put, from his point of view—there was no denying that.

"Even if I consented to your proposal," he said, "I should object to your annoying the young lady with impertinent questions, or to your being introduced as a spy into a respectable house."

Old Sharon doubled his dirty fists and drummed with them on the rickety table in a comical frenzy of impatience while Mr. Troy was speaking.

"What the devil do you know about my way of doing my business?" he burst out when the lawyer had done. "One of us two is talking like a born idiot—and (mind this) it isn't me. Look here! Your young lady goes out for a walk, and she meets with a dirty, shabby old beggar—I look like a shabby old beggar already, don't I? Very good. This dirty old wretch whines and whimpers and tells a long story, and gets

sixpence out of the girl—and knows her by that time, inside and out, as well as if he had made her—and, mark! hasn't asked her a single question, and, instead of annoying her, has made her happy in the performance of a charitable action. Stop a bit! I haven't done with you yet. Who blacks your boots and shoes? Look here!" He pushed his pug dog off his lap, dived under the table, appeared again with an old boot and a bottle of blacking, and set to work with tigerish activity. "I'm going out for a walk, you know, and I may as well make myself smart." With that announcement, he began to sing over his work—a song of sentiment, popular in England in the early part of the present century—"She's all my fancy painted her; she's lovely, she's divine; but her heart it is another's; and it never can be mine! Too-ral-loo-ral-loo. I like a love song. Brush away! brush away! till I see my own pretty face in the blacking. Hey! Here's a nice, harmless, jolly old man! sings and jokes over his work, and makes the kitchen quite cheerful. What's that you say? He's a stranger, and don't talk to him too freely. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to speak in that way of a poor old fellow with one foot in the grave. Mrs. cook will give him a nice bit of dinner in the scullery; and John-footman will look out an old coat for him. And when he's heard everything he wants to hear, and doesn't come back again the next day to his work—what do they think of it in the servants' hall? Do they say, 'We've had a spy among us?' Yah! you know better than that, by this time. The cheerful old man has been run over in the street, or is down with the fever, or has turned up his toes in the parish deadhouse—that's what they say in the servants' hall! Try

me in your own kitchen, and see if your servants take me for a spy. Come, come, Mr. Lawyer! out with your ten pounds, and don't waste any more precious time about it!"

"I will consider, and let you know," said Mr. Troy.

Old Sharon laughed more ferociously than ever, and hobbled round the table in a great hurry to the place at which Moody was sitting. He laid one hand on the steward's shoulder, and pointed derisively with the other to Mr. Troy.

"I say, Mr. Silent-man! Bet you five pounds I never hear of that lawyer again!"

Silently attentive all through the interview (except when he was answering questions), Moody only replied in the fewest possible words. "I don't bet," was all he said. He showed no resentment at Sharon's familiarity, and he appeared to find no amusement in Sharon's extraordinary talk. The old vagabond seemed actually to produce a serious impression on him! When Mr. Troy set the example of rising to go, he still kept his seat, and looked at the lawyer as if he regretted leaving the atmosphere of tobacco-smoke reeking in the dirty room.

"Have you anything to say before we go?" Mr. Troy asked.

Moody rose slowly, and looked at Old Sharon. "Not just now, Sir," he replied, looking away again, after a moment's reflection.

Old Sharon interpreted Moody's look and Moody's reply from his own peculiar point of view. He suddenly drew the steward away into a corner of the room.

"I say!" he began in a whisper. "Upon your solemn word of honour, you know—are you as rich as the lawyer there?"

"Certainly not."

"Look here! It's half price to a poor man. If you feel like coming back, on your own account—five pounds will do from *you*. There! there! Think of it—think of it!"

"Now, then?" said Mr. Troy, waiting for his companion, with the door open in his hand. He looked back at Sharon when Moody joined him. The old vagabond was settled again in his arm-chair, with his dog in his lap, his pipe in his mouth, and his French novel in his hand; exhibiting exactly the picture of frowsy comfort which he had presented when his visitors first entered the room.

"Good day," said Mr. Troy, with haughty condescension.

"Don't interrupt me!" rejoined old Sharon, absorbed in his novel. "You've had your guinea's-worth. Lord! what a lovely book this is! Don't interrupt me!"

"Impudent scoundrel!" said Mr. Troy, when he and Moody were in the street again. "What could my friend mean by recommending him? Fancy his expecting me to trust him with ten pounds! I consider even the guinea completely thrown away."

"Begging your pardon, Sir," said Moody, "I don't quite agree with you there."

"What! you don't mean to tell me you understand that oracular sentence of his?—'Suspect the very last person on whom suspicion could possibly fall.' Rubbish!"

"I don't say I understand it, Sir. I only say it has set me thinking."

"Thinking of what? Do your suspicions point to the thief?"

"If you will please to excuse me, Mr. Troy, I should like to wait a while before I answer that."

Mr. Troy suddenly stood still, and eyed his companion a little distrustfully.

"Are you going to turn detective policeman on your own account?" he asked.

"There's nothing I won't turn to, and try, to help Miss Isabel in this matter," Moody answered, firmly. "I have saved a few hundred pounds in Lady Lydiard's service, and I am ready to spend every farthing of it, if I can only discover the thief."

Mr. Troy walked on again. "Miss Isabel seems to have a good friend in you," he said. He was (perhaps unconsciously) a little offended by the independent tone in which the steward spoke, after he had himself engaged to take the vindication of the girl's innocence into his own hands.

"Miss Isabel has a devoted servant and slave in me!" Moody answered, with passionate enthusiasm.

"Very creditable; I haven't a word to say against it," Mr. Troy rejoined. "But don't forget that the young lady has other devoted friends besides you. I am her devoted friend, for instance—I have promised to serve her, and I mean to keep my word. You will excuse me for adding that my experience and discretion are quite as likely to be useful to her as your enthusiasm. I know the world well enough to be careful in trusting strangers. It will do you no harm, Mr. Moody, to follow my example."

Moody accepted his reproof with becoming patience and resignation. "If you have anything to propose, Sir, that will be of service to Miss Isabel," he said, "I shall be happy if I can assist you in the humblest capacity."

"And if not?" Mr. Troy inquired, conscious of having nothing to propose as he asked the question.

"In that case, Sir, I must take my own course, and blame nobody but myself if it leads me astray."

Mr. Troy said no more: he parted from Moody at the next turning.

Pursuing the subject privately in his own mind, he decided on taking the earliest opportunity of visiting Isabel at her aunt's house, and on warning her, in her future intercourse with Moody, not to trust too much to the steward's discretion. "I haven't a doubt," thought the lawyer, "of what he means to do next. The infatuated fool is going back to Old Sharon!"

CHAPTER X.

RETURNING to his office, Mr. Troy discovered, among the correspondence that was waiting for him, a letter from the very person whose welfare was still the uppermost subject in his mind. Isabel Miller wrote in these terms:—

"Dear Sir,—My aunt, Miss Pink, is very desirous of consulting you professionally at the earliest opportunity. Although South Morden is within little more than half an hour's railway ride from London, Miss Pink does not presume to ask you to visit her, being well aware of the value of your time. Will you, there-

fore, be so kind as to let me know when it will be convenient to you to receive my aunt at your office in London? Believe me, dear Sir, respectfully yours, ISABEL MILLER. P.S.—I am further instructed to say that the regretable event at Lady Lydiard's house is the proposed subject of the consultation. The Lawn, South Morden. Thursday."

Mr. Troy smiled as he read the letter. "Too formal for a young girl!" he said to himself. "Every word of it has been dictated by Miss Pink." He was not long in deciding what course he should take. There was a pressing necessity for cautioning Isabel, and here was his opportunity. He sent for his head clerk, and looked at his list of engagements for the day. There was nothing set down in the book which the clerk was not quite as well able to manage as the master. Mr. Troy consulted his railway-guide, ordered his cab, and caught the next train to South Morden.

South Morden was then (and remains to this day) one of those primitive agricultural villages, passed over by the march of modern progress, which are still to be found in the near neighbourhood of London. Only the slow trains stopped at the station; and there was so little to do that the station-master and his porter grew flowers on the embankment and trained creepers over the waiting-room window. Turning your back on the railway, and walking along the one street of South Morden, you found yourself in the old England of two centuries since. Gabled cottages, with fast-closed windows; pigs and poultry in quiet possession of the road; the venerable church surrounded by its shady burial-ground; the grocer's shop which sold everything, and the butcher's shop which sold nothing; the scarce

inhabitants who liked a good look at a stranger, and the unwashed children who were pictures of dirty health; the clash of the iron-chained bucket in the public well, and the thump of the falling ninepins in the skittle-ground behind the public-house; the horse-pond on one bit of open ground, and the old elm-tree with the wooden seat round it on the other—these were some of the objects that you saw, and some of the noises that you heard in South Morden, as you passed from one end of the village to the other.

About half a mile beyond the last of the old cottages, modern England met you again under the form of a row of little villas, set up by an adventurous London builder who had bought the land a bargain. Each villa stood in its own little garden, and looked across a stony road at the meadow lands and softly-rising wooded hills beyond. Each villa faced you in the sunshine with the horrid glare of new red brick, and forced its nonsensical name on your attention, traced in bright paint on the posts of its entrance gate. Consulting the posts as he advanced, Mr. Troy arrived in due course of time at the villa called The Lawn, which derived its name apparently from a circular patch of grass in front of the house. The gate resisting his efforts to open it, he rang the bell.

Admitted by a trim, clean, shy little maid-servant, Mr. Troy looked about him in silent amazement. Turn which way he might, he found himself silently confronted by posted and painted instructions to visitors, which forbade him to do this, and commanded him to do that, at every step of his progress from the gate to the house. On the side of the lawn a label informed him that he was not to walk on the grass. On the

other side a painted hand pointed along a boundary-wall to an inscription which warned him to go that way if he had business in the kitchen. On the gravel walk at the foot of the house-steps words, neatly traced in little white shells, reminded him not to "forget the scraper." On the door-step he was informed, in letters of lead, that he was "Welcome!" On the mat in the passage bristly black words burst on his attention, commanding him to "wipe his shoes." Even the hat-stand in the hall was not allowed to speak for itself; it had "Hats and Cloaks" inscribed on it, and it issued its directions imperatively in the matter of your wet umbrella—"Put it here!"

Giving the trim little servant his card, Mr. Troy was introduced to a reception-room on the lower floor. Before he had time to look round him the door was opened again from without, and Isabel stole into the room on tiptoe. She looked worn and anxious. When she shook hands with the old lawyer the charming smile that he remembered so well was gone.

"Don't say you have seen me," she whispered. "I am not to come into the room till my aunt sends for me. Tell me two things before I run away again. How is Lady Lydiard? And have you discovered the thief?"

"Lady Lydiard was well when I last saw her; and we have not yet succeeded in discovering the thief." Having answered the questions in those terms, Mr. Troy decided on cautioning Isabel on the subject of the steward while he had the chance. "One question on my side," he said, holding her back from the door by the arm. "Do you expect Moody to visit you here?"

"I am *sure* he will visit me," Isabel answered, warmly. "He has promised to come here at my request. I never knew what a kind heart Robert Moody had till this misfortune fell on me. My aunt, who is not easily taken with strangers, respects and admires him. I can't tell you how good he was to me on the journey here—and how kindly, how nobly, he spoke to me when we parted." She paused, and turned her head away. The tears were rising in her eyes. "In my situation," she said, faintly, "kindness is very keenly felt. Don't notice me, Mr. Troy."

The lawyer waited a moment to let her recover herself.

"I agree entirely, my dear, in your opinion of Moody," he said. "At the same time, I think it right to warn you that his zeal in your service may possibly outrun his discretion. He may feel too confidently about penetrating the mystery of the missing money; and, unless you are on your guard, he may raise false hopes in you when you next see him. Listen to any advice that he may give you, by all means. But, before you decide on being guided by his opinion, consult my older experience, and hear what I have to say on the subject. Don't suppose that I am attempting to make you distrust this good friend," he added, noticing the look of uneasy surprise which Isabel fixed on him. "No such idea is in my mind. I only warn you that Moody's eagerness to be of service to you may mislead him. You understand me."

"Yes, Sir," replied Isabel, coldly; "I understand you. Please let me go now. My aunt will be down

directly; and she must not find me here." She curtseyed with distant respect and left the room.

"So much for trying to put two ideas together into a girl's mind!" thought Mr. Troy, when he was alone again. "The little fool evidently thinks I am jealous of Moody's place in her estimation. Well! I have done my duty—and I can do no more."

He looked round the room. Not a chair was out of its place, not a speck of dust was to be seen. The brightly-perfect polish of the table made your eyes ache; the ornaments on it looked as if they had never been touched by mortal hand; the piano was an object for distant admiration, not an instrument to be played on; the carpet made Mr. Troy look nervously at the soles of his shoes; and the sofa (protected by layers of white crochet-work) said as plainly as if in words, "Sit on me if you dare!" Mr. Troy retreated to a bookcase at the farther end of the room. The books fitted the shelves to such absolute perfection that he had some difficulty in taking one of them out. When he had succeeded, he found himself in possession of a volume of the History of England. On the fly-leaf he encountered another written warning:—"This book belongs to Miss Pink's Academy for Young Ladies, and is not to be removed from the library." The date, which was added, referred to a period of ten years since. Miss Pink now stood revealed as a retired schoolmistress; and Mr. Troy began to understand some of the characteristic peculiarities of that lady's establishment which had puzzled him up to the present time.

He had just succeeded in putting the book back

again when the door opened once more, and Isabel's aunt entered the room.

If Miss Pink could, by any possible conjuncture of circumstances, have disappeared mysteriously from her house and her friends, the police would have found the greatest difficulty in composing the necessary description of the missing lady. The acutest observer could have discovered nothing that was noticeable or characteristic in her personal appearance. The pen of the present writer portrays her in despair by a series of negatives. She was not young, she was not old; she was neither tall nor short, nor stout nor thin; nobody could call her features attractive, and nobody could call them ugly; there was nothing in her voice, her expression, her manner, or her dress that differed in any appreciable degree from the voice, expression, manner, and dress of five hundred thousand other single ladies of her age and position in the world. If you had asked her to describe herself, she would have answered, "I am a gentlewoman;" and if you had further inquired which of her numerous accomplishments took highest rank in her own esteem, she would have replied, "My powers of conversation." For the rest, she was Miss Pink, of South Morden; and, when that has been said, all has been said.

"Pray be seated, Sir. We have had a beautiful day, after the late long continued wet weather. I am told that the season is very unfavourable for wall-fruit. May I offer you some refreshment after your journey?" In these terms, and in the smoothest of voices, Miss Pink opened the interview.

Mr. Troy made a polite reply, and added a few strictly conventional remarks on the beauty of the

neighbourhood. Not even a lawyer could sit in Miss Pink's presence, and hear Miss Pink's conversation, without feeling himself called upon (in the nursery phrase) to "be on his best behaviour."

"It is extremely kind of you, Mr. Troy, to favour me with this visit," Miss Pink resumed. "I am well aware that the time of professional gentlemen is of especial value to them; and I will therefore ask you to excuse me if I proceed abruptly to the subject on which I desire to consult your experience."

Here the lady modestly smoothed out her dress over her knees, and the lawyer made a bow. Miss Pink's highly-trained conversation had perhaps one fault—it was not, strictly speaking, conversation at all. In its effect on her hearers it rather resembled the contents of a fluently conventional letter, read aloud.

"The circumstances under which my niece Isabel has left Lady Lydiard's house," Miss Pink proceeded, "are so indescribably painful—I will go further, I will say so deeply humiliating—that I have forbidden her to refer to them again in my presence, or to mention them in the future to any living creature besides myself. You are acquainted with those circumstances, Mr. Troy; and you will understand my indignation when I first learnt that my sister's child had been suspected of theft. I have not the honour of being acquainted with Lady Lydiard. She is not a Countess, I believe? Just so! her husband was only a Baron. I am not acquainted with Lady Lydiard; and I will not trust myself to say what I think of her conduct to my niece."

"Pardon me, Madam," Mr. Troy interposed. "Be-

fore you say any more about Lady Lydiard, I must really beg leave to observe"——

"Pardon *me*," Miss Pink rejoined. "I never form a hasty judgment. Lady Lydiard's conduct is beyond the reach of any defence, no matter how ingenious it may be. You may not be aware, Sir, that in receiving my niece under her roof her Ladyship was receiving a gentlewoman by birth as well as by education. My late lamented sister was the daughter of a clergyman of the Church of England. I need hardly remind you that, as such, she was a born lady. Under favouring circumstances, Isabel's maternal grandfather might have been Archbishop of Canterbury, and have taken precedence of the whole house of Peers, the Princes of the blood Royal alone excepted. I am not prepared to say that my niece is equally well connected on her father's side. My sister surprised—I will not add shocked—us when she married a chemist. At the same time, a chemist is not a tradesman. He is a gentleman at one end of the profession of Medicine, and a titled physician is a gentleman at the other end. That is all. In inviting Isabel to reside with her, Lady Lydiard, I repeat, was bound to remember that she was associating herself with a young gentlewoman. She has *not* remembered this, which is one insult; and she has suspected my niece of theft, which is another."

Miss Pink paused to take breath. Mr. Troy made a second attempt to get a hearing.

"Will you kindly permit me, Madam, to say two words?"

"No!" said Miss Pink, asserting the most immovable obstinacy under the blandest politeness of

manner. "Your time, Mr. Troy, is really too valuable! Not even your trained intellect can excuse conduct which is manifestly *in*excusable on the face of it. Now you know my opinion of Lady Lydiard, you will not be surprised to hear that I decline to trust her Ladyship. She may, or she may not, cause the necessary inquiries to be made for the vindication of my niece's character. In a matter so serious as this—I may say, in a duty which I owe to the memories of my sister and my parents—I will not leave the responsibility to Lady Lydiard. I will take it on myself. Let me add that I am able to pay the necessary expenses. The earlier years of my life, Mr. Troy, have been passed in the tuition of young ladies. I have been happy in meriting the confidence of parents; and I have been strict in observing the golden rules of economy. On my retirement, I have been able to invest a modest, a very modest, little fortune in the Funds. A portion of it is at the service of my niece for the recovery of her good name; and I desire to place the necessary investigation, confidentially, in your hands. You are acquainted with the case; and the case naturally goes to you. I could not prevail on myself—I really could not prevail on myself to mention it to a stranger. That is the business on which I wished to consult you. Please say nothing more about Lady Lydiard—the subject is inexpressibly disagreeable to me. I will only trespass on your kindness to tell me if I have succeeded in making myself understood."

Miss Pink leaned back in her chair, at the exact angle permitted by the laws of propriety; rested her left elbow on the palm of her right hand, and lightly supported her cheek with her fore finger and thumb.

In this position she waited Mr. Troy's answer—the living picture of human obstinacy, in its most respectable form.

If Mr. Troy had not been a lawyer—in other words, if he had not been professionally capable of persisting in his own course, in the face of every conceivable difficulty and discouragement—Miss Pink might have remained in undisturbed possession of her own opinions. As it was, Mr. Troy had got his hearing at last; and no matter how obstinately she might close her eyes to it, Miss Pink was now destined to have the other side of the case presented to her view.

"I am sincerely obliged to you, Madam, for the expression of your confidence in me," Mr. Troy began; "at the same time, I must beg you to excuse me if I decline to accept your proposal."

Miss Pink had not expected to receive such an answer as this. The lawyer's brief refusal surprised and annoyed her.

"Why do you decline to assist me?" she asked.

"Because," answered Mr. Troy, "my services are already engaged in Miss Isabel's interest, by a client whom I have served for more than twenty years. My client is"——

Miss Pink anticipated the coming disclosure. "You need not trouble yourself, Sir, to mention your client's name," she said.

"My client," persisted Mr. Troy, "loves Miss Isabel, dearly"——

"That is a matter of opinion," Miss Pink interposed.

"And believes in Miss Isabel's innocence," pro-

ceeded the irrepressible lawyer, "as firmly as you believe in it yourself."

Miss Pink (being human) had a temper; and Mr. Troy had found his way to it.

"If Lady Lydiard believes in my niece's innocence," said Miss Pink, suddenly sitting bolt upright in her chair, "why has my niece been compelled, in justice to herself to leave Lady Lydiard's house?"

"You will admit, Madam," Mr. Troy answered cautiously, "that we are all of us liable, in this wicked world, to be the victims of appearances. Your niece is a victim—an innocent victim. She wisely withdraws from Lady Lydiard's house until appearances are proved to be false and her position is cleared up."

Miss Pink had her reply ready. "That is simply acknowledging, in other words, that my niece is suspected. I am only a woman, Mr. Troy—but it is not quite so easy to mislead me as you seem to suppose."

Mr. Troy's temper was admirably trained. But it began to acknowledge that Miss Pink's powers of irritation could sting to some purpose.

"No intention of misleading you, Madam, has ever crossed my mind," he rejoined warmly. "As for your niece, I can tell you this. In all my experience of Lady Lydiard, I never saw her so distressed as she was when Miss Isabel left the house!"

"Indeed?" said Miss Pink, with an incredulous smile. "In my rank of life, when we feel distressed about a person, we do our best to comfort that person by a kind letter or an early visit. But then I am not a lady of title."

"Lady Lydiard engaged herself to call on Miss

Isabel in my hearing," said Mr. Troy. "Lady Lydiard is the most generous woman living!"

"Lady Lydiard is here!" cried a joyful voice on the other side of the door.

At the same moment, Isabel burst into the room in a state of excitement which actually ignored the formidable presence of Miss Pink. "I beg your pardon, aunt! I was up stairs at the window, and I saw the carriage stop at the gate. And Tommie has come, too! The darling saw me at the window!" cried the poor girl, her eyes sparkling with delight as a perfect explosion of barking made itself heard over the tramp of horses' feet and the crash of carriage wheels outside.

Miss Pink rose slowly, with a dignity that looked capable of adequately receiving—not one noble lady only, but the whole peerage of England.

"Control yourself, dear Isabel," she said. "No, well-bred young lady permits herself to become unduly excited. Stand by my side—a little behind me."

Isabel obeyed. Mr. Troy kept his place, and privately enjoyed his triumph over Miss Pink. If Lady Lydiard had been actually in league with him, she could not have chosen a more opportune time for her visit. A momentary interval passed. The carriage drew up at the door; the horses trampled on the gravel; the bell rang madly; the uproar of Tommie, released from the carriage and clamouring to be let in, redoubled its fury. Never before had such an unruly burst of noises invaded the tranquillity of Miss Pink's villa!

CHAPTER XI.

THE trim little maid-servant ran up stairs from her modest little kitchen, trembling at the terrible prospect of having to open the door. Miss Pink, deafened by the barking, had just time to say, "What a very ill-behaved dog," when a sound of small objects overthrown in the hall, and a scurrying of furious claws across the oil-cloth, announced that Tommie had invaded the house. As the servant appeared, introducing Lady Lydiard, the dog ran in. He made one frantic leap at Isabel, which would certainly have knocked her down but for the chair that happened to be standing behind her. Received on her lap, the faithful creature half smothered her with his caresses. He barked, he shrieked, in his joy at seeing her again. He jumped off her lap and tore round and round the room at the top of his speed; and every time he passed Miss Pink he showed the whole range of his teeth and snarled ferociously at her ankles. Having at last exhausted his superfluous energy, he leapt back again on Isabel's lap, with his tongue quivering in his open mouth, his tail wagging softly, and his eye on Miss Pink, inquiring how she liked a dog in her drawing-room!

"I hope my dog has not disturbed you, Ma'am?" said Lady Lydiard, advancing from the mat at the doorway, on which she had patiently waited until the raptures of Tommie subsided into repose.

Miss Pink, trembling between terror and indignation, acknowledged Lady Lydiard's polite inquiry by a ceremonious bow, and an answer which administered by implication a dignified reproof. "Your Ladyship's dog does not appear to be a very well-trained animal," the ex-schoolmistress remarked.

"Well trained?" Lady Lydiard repeated, as if the expression was perfectly unintelligible to her. "I don't think you have had much experience of dogs, Ma'am." She turned to Isabel, and embraced her tenderly. "Give me a kiss, my dear—you don't know how wretched I have been since you left me." She looked back again at Miss Pink. "You are not, perhaps, aware, Ma'am, that my dog is devotedly attached to your niece. A dog's love has been considered by many great men (whose names at the moment escape me) as the most touching and disinterested of all earthly affections." She looked the other way, and discovered the lawyer. "How do you do, Mr. Troy; it's a pleasant surprise to find you here. The house was so dull without Isabel that I really couldn't put off seeing her any longer. When you are more used to Tommie, Miss Pink, you will understand and admire him. *You* understand and admire him, Isabel—don't you? My child! you are not looking well. I shall take you back with me, when the horses have had their rest. We shall never be happy away from each other."

Having expressed her sentiments, distributed her greetings, and defended her dog—all, as it were, in one breath—Lady Lydiard sat down by Isabel's side, and opened a large green fan that hung at her girdle. "You have no idea, Miss Pink, how fat people suffer

in hot weather," said the old lady, using her fan vigorously.

Miss Pink's eyes dropped modestly to the ground —"fat" was such a coarse word to use, if a lady *must* speak of her own superfluous flesh! "May I offer some refreshment?" Miss Pink asked, mincingly. "A cup of tea?"

Lady Lydiard shook her head.

"A glass of water?"

Lady Lydiard declined this last hospitable proposal with an exclamation of disgust. "Have you got any beer?" she inquired.

"I beg your Ladyship's pardon," said Miss Pink, doubting the evidence of her own ears. "Did you say —beer?"

Lady Lydiard gesticulated vehemently with her fan. "Yes, to be sure! Beer! beer!"

Miss Pink rose, with a countenance expressive of genteel disgust, and rang the bell. "I think you have beer downstairs, Susan?" she said, when the maid appeared at the door.

"Yes, Miss."

"A glass of beer for Lady Lydiard," said Miss Pink —under protest.

"Bring it in a jug," shouted her Ladyship, as the maid left the room. "I like to froth it up for myself," she continued, addressing Miss Pink. "Isabel sometimes does it for me, when she is at home—don't you, my dear?"

Miss Pink had been waiting her opportunity to assert her own claim to the possession of her own niece, from the time when Lady Lydiard had coolly declared

her intention of taking Isabel back with her. The opportunity now presented itself.

"Your Ladyship will pardon me," she said, "if I remark that my niece's home is under my humble roof. I am properly sensible, I hope, of your kindness to Isabel; but while she remains the object of a disgraceful suspicion she remains with Me."

Lady Lydiard closed her fan with an angry snap.

"You are completely mistaken, Miss Pink. You may not mean it—but you speak most unjustly if you say that your niece is an object of suspicion to me, or to anybody in my house."

Mr. Troy, quietly listening up to this point, now interposed to stop the discussion before it could degenerate into a personal quarrel. His keen observation, aided by his accurate knowledge of his client's character, had plainly revealed to him what was passing in Lady Lydiard's mind. She had entered the house, feeling (perhaps unconsciously) a jealousy of Miss Pink, as her predecessor in Isabel's affections, and as the natural protectress of the girl under existing circumstances. Miss Pink's reception of her dog had additionally irritated the old lady. She had taken a malicious pleasure in shocking the schoolmistress's sense of propriety—and she was now only too ready to proceed to further extremities on the delicate question of Isabel's justification for leaving her house. For Isabel's own sake, therefore—to say nothing of other reasons—it was urgently desirable to keep the peace between the two ladies. With this excellent object in view, Mr. Troy seized his opportunity of striking into the conversation for the first time.

"Pardon me, Lady Lydiard," he said, "you are

speaking of a subject which has been already sufficiently discussed between Miss Pink and myself. I think we shall do better not to dwell uselessly on past events, but to direct our attention to the future. We are all equally satisfied of the complete rectitude of Miss Isabel's conduct, and we are all equally interested in the vindication of her good name."

Whether these temperate words would of themselves have exercised the pacifying influence at which Mr. Troy aimed may be doubtful. But, as he ceased speaking, a powerful auxiliary appeared in the shape of the beer. Lady Lydiard seized on the jug, and filled the tumbler for herself with an unsteady hand. Miss Pink, trembling for the integrity of her carpet, and scandalised at seeing a peeress drinking beer like a washerwoman, forgot the sharp answer that was just rising to her lips when the lawyer interfered. "Small!" said Lady Lydiard, setting down the empty tumbler, and referring to the quality of the beer. "But very pleasant and refreshing. What's the servant's name? Susan? Well, Susan, I was dying of thirst; and you have saved my life. You can leave the jug—I dare say I shall empty it before I go."

Mr. Troy, watching Miss Pink's face, saw that it was time to change the subject again.

"Did you notice the old village, Lady Lydiard, on your way here?" he asked. "The artists consider it one of the most picturesque places in England."

"I noticed that it was a very dirty village," Lady Lydiard answered, still bent on making herself disagreeable to Miss Pink. "The artists may say what they please; I see nothing to admire in rotten cottages, and bad drainage, and ignorant people. I suppose the

neighbourhood has its advantages. It looks dull enough, to my mind."

Isabel had hitherto modestly restricted her exertions to keeping Tommie quiet on her lap. Like Mr. Troy, she occasionally looked at her aunt—and she now made a timid attempt to defend the neighbourhood, as a duty that she owed to Miss Pink.

"Oh, my Lady! don't say it's a dull neighbourhood," she pleaded. "There are such pretty walks all round us. And, when you get to the hills, the view is beautiful."

Lady Lydiard's answer to this was a little masterpiece of good-humoured contempt. She patted Isabel's cheek, and said, "Pooh! pooh!"

"Your Ladyship does not admire the beauties of Nature," Miss Pink remarked, with a compassionate smile. "As we get older, no doubt our sight begins to fail"—

"And we leave off canting about the beauties of Nature," added Lady Lydiard. "I hate the country. Give me London, and the pleasures of society."

"Come! come! Do the country justice, Lady Lydiard!" put in peace-making Mr. Troy. "There is plenty of society to be found out of London—as good society as the world can show."

"The sort of society," added Miss Pink, "which is to be found, for example, in this neighbourhood. Her Ladyship is evidently not aware that persons of distinction surround us, whichever way we turn. I may instance, among others, the Honourable Mr. Hardyman——"

Lady Lydiard, in the act of pouring out a second glassful of beer, suddenly set down the jug.

"Who is that you're talking of, Miss Pink?"

"I am talking of our neighbour, Lady Lydiard—the Honourable Mr. Hardyman."

"Do you mean Alfred Hardyman—the man who breeds the horses?"

"The distinguished gentleman who owns the famous studfarm," said Miss Pink, correcting the bluntly-direct form in which Lady Lydiard had put her question.

"Is he in the habit of visiting here?" the old lady inquired, with a sudden appearance of anxiety. "Do you know him?"

"I had the honour of being introduced to Mr. Hardyman at our last flower show," Miss Pink replied. "He has not yet favoured me with a visit."

Lady Lydiard's anxiety appeared to be to some extent relieved.

"I knew that Hardyman's farm was in this county," she said; "but I had no notion that it was in the neighbourhood of South Morden. How far away is he—ten or a dozen miles, eh?"

"Not more than three miles," answered Miss Pink. "We consider him quite a near neighbour of ours."

Renewed anxiety showed itself in Lady Lydiard. She looked round sharply at Isabel. The girl's head was bent so low over the rough head of the dog that her face was almost entirely concealed from view. So far as appearances went, she seemed to be entirely absorbed in fondling Tommie. Lady Lydiard roused her with a tap of the green fan.

"Take Tommie out, Isabel, for a run in the garden," she said. "He won't sit still much longer—and he may annoy Miss Pink. Mr. Troy, will you kindly help Isabel to keep my ill-trained dog in order?"

Mr. Troy got on his feet, and, not very willingly, followed Isabel out of the room. "They will quarrel now, to a dead certainty!" he thought to himself, as he closed the door. "Have you any idea of what this means?" he said to his companion, as he joined her in the hall. "What has Mr. Hardyman done to excite all this interest in him?"

Isabel's guilty colour rose. She knew perfectly well that Hardyman's unconcealed admiration of her was the guiding motive of Lady Lydiard's inquiries. If she had told the truth, Mr. Troy would have unquestionably returned to the drawing-room, with or without an acceptable excuse for intruding himself. But Isabel was a woman; and her answer, it is needless to say, was, "I don't know, I'm sure."

In the meantime, the interview between the two ladies began in a manner which would have astonished Mr. Troy—they were both silent. For once in her life Lady Lydiard was considering what she should say, before she said it. Miss Pink, on her side, naturally waited to hear what object her Ladyship had in view —waited, until her small reserves of patience gave way. Urged by irresistible curiosity, she spoke first.

"Have you anything to say to me in private?" she asked.

Lady Lydiard had not got to the end of her reflections. She said "Yes!"—and she said no more.

"Is it anything relating to my niece?" persisted Miss Pink.

Still immersed in her reflections, Lady Lydiard suddenly rose to the surface, and spoke her mind, as usual.

"About your niece, Ma'am. The other day Mr. Hardyman called at my house, and saw Isabel."

"Yes," said Miss Pink, politely attentive, but not in the least interested, so far.

"That's not all, Ma'am. Mr. Hardyman admires Isabel; he owned it to me himself in so many words."

Miss Pink listened, with a courteous inclination of her head. She looked mildly gratified, nothing more. Lady Lydiard proceeded—

"You and I think differently on many matters," she said. "But we are both agreed, I am sure, in feeling the sincerest interest in Isabel's welfare. I beg to suggest to you, Miss Pink, that Mr. Hardyman, as a near neighbour of yours, is a very undesirable neighbour while Isabel remains in your house."

Saying those words, under a strong conviction of the serious importance of the subject, Lady Lydiard insensibly recovered the manner and resumed the language which befitted a lady of her rank. Miss Pink, noticing the change, set it down to an expression of pride on the part of her visitor which, in referring to Isabel, assailed indirectly the social position of Isabel's aunt.

"I fail entirely to understand what your Ladyship means," she said, coldly.

Lady Lydiard, on her side, looked in undisguised amazement at Miss Pink.

"Haven't I told you already that Mr. Hardyman admires your niece?" she asked.

"Naturally," said Miss Pink. "Isabel inherits her lamented mother's personal advantages. If Mr. Hardyman admires her, Mr. Hardyman shows his good taste."

Lady Lydiard's eyes opened wider and wider in wonder. "My good lady!" she exclaimed, "is it possible you don't know that when a man admires a woman he doesn't stop there? He falls in love with her (as the saying is) next."

"So I have heard," said Miss Pink.

"So you have *heard?*" repeated Lady Lydiard. "If Mr. Hardyman finds his way to Isabel I can tell you what you will *see.* Catch the two together, Ma'am —and you will see Mr. Hardyman making love to your niece."

"Under due restrictions, Lady Lydiard, and with my permission first obtained, of course, I see no objection to Mr. Hardyman paying his addresses to Isabel."

"The woman is mad!" cried Lady Lydiard. "Do you actually suppose, Miss Pink, that Alfred Hardyman could, by any earthly possibility, marry your niece?"

Not even Miss Pink's politeness could submit to such a question as this. She rose indignantly from her chair. "Are you aware, Lady Lydiard, that the doubt you have just expressed is an insult to my niece, and an insult to Me?"

"Are *you* aware of who Mr. Hardyman really is?" retorted her Ladyship. "Or do you judge of his position by the vocation in life which he has perversely chosen to adopt? I can tell you, if you do, that Alfred Hardyman is the younger son of one of the oldest Barons in the English Peerage, and that his mother is related by marriage to the Royal family of Wurtemberg."

Miss Pink received the full shock of this informa-

tion without receding from her position by a hair's breath.

"An English gentlewoman offers a fit alliance to any man living who seeks her hand in marriage," said Miss Pink. "Isabel's mother (you may not be aware of it) was the daughter of an English clergyman"——

"And Isabel's father was a chemist in a country town," added Lady Lydiard.

"Isabel's father," rejoined Miss Pink, "was attached in a most responsible capacity to the useful and honourable profession of Medicine. Isabel is, in the strictest sense of the word, a young gentlewoman. If you contradict that for a single instant, Lady Lydiard, you will oblige me to leave the room."

Those last words produced a result which Miss Pink had not anticipated—they roused Lady Lydiard to assert herself. As usual in such cases, she rose superior to her own eccentricity. Confronting Miss Pink, she now spoke and looked with the gracious courtesy and the unpresuming self-confidence of the order to which she belonged.

"For Isabel's own sake, and for the quieting of my conscience," she answered, "I will say one word more, Miss Pink, before I relieve you of my presence. Considering my age and my opportunities, I may claim to know quite as much as you do of the laws and customs which regulate society in our time. Without contesting your niece's social position—and without the slightest intention of insulting you—I repeat that the rank which Mr. Hardyman inherits makes it simply impossible for him even to think of marrying Isabel. You will do well not to give him any opportunities of meeting with her alone. And you will do better still

seeing that he is so near a neighbour of yours) if you permit Isabel to return to my protection, for a time at least. I will wait to hear from you when you have thought the matter over at your leisure. In the meantime, if I have inadvertently offended you, I ask your pardon—and I wish you good evening."

She bowed, and walked to the door. Miss Pink, as resolute as ever in maintaining her pretensions, made an effort to match the great lady on her own ground.

"Before you go, Lady Lydiard, I beg to apologise if I have spoken too warmly on my side," she said. "Permit me to send for your carriage."

"Thank you, Miss Pink. My carriage is only at the village inn. I shall enjoy a little walk in the cool evening air. Mr. Troy, I have no doubt, will give me his arm." She bowed once more, and quietly left the room.

Reaching the little back garden of the villa, through an open door at the further end of the hall, Lady Lydiard found Tommie rolling luxuriously on Miss Pink's flower-beds, and Isabel and Mr. Troy in close consultation on the gravel-walk. She spoke to the lawyer first.

"They are baiting the horses at the inn," she said. "I want your arm, Mr. Troy, as far as the village—and, in return, I will take you back to London with me. I have to ask your advice about one or two little matters, and this is a good opportunity."

"With the greatest pleasure, Lady Lydiard. I suppose I must say good-by to Miss Pink?"

"A word of advice to you, Mr. Troy. Take care

how you ruffle Miss Pink's sense of her own importance. Another word for your private ear. Miss Pink is a fool!"

On the lawyer's withdrawal, Lady Lydiard put her arm fondly round Isabel's waist. "What were you and Mr. Troy so busy in talking about?" she asked.

"We were talking, my Lady, about tracing the person who stole the money," Isabel answered, rather sadly. "It seems a far more difficult matter than I supposed it to be. I try not to lose patience and hope—but it is a little hard to feel that the appearances are against me, and to wait day after day in vain for the discovery that is to set me right."

"You are a dear good child," said Lady Lydiard; "and you are more precious to me than ever. Don't despair, Isabel. With Mr. Troy's means of inquiring, and with my means of paying, the discovery of the thief cannot be much longer delayed. If you don't return to me soon, I shall come back and see you again. Your aunt hates the sight of me—but I don't care two straws for that," remarked her Ladyship, showing the undignified side of her character once more. "Listen to me, Isabel! I have no wish to lower your aunt in your estimation, but I feel far more confidence in your good sense than in her's. Mr. Hardyman's business has taken him to France for the present. It is at least possible that you may meet with him on his return. If you do, keep him at a distance, my dear—politely, of course. There! there! you needn't turn red; I am not blaming you; I am only giving you a little good advice. In your position you cannot possibly be too careful. Here is Mr. Troy! You must come to the gate with us, Isabel, or we shall

never get Tommie away from you; I am only his second favourite; you have the first place in his affections. God bless and prosper you, my child—I wish to Heaven you were going back to London with me! Well, Mr. Troy, how have you done with Miss Pink? Have you offended that terrible 'gentlewoman' (hateful word!); or has it been all the other way, and has she given you a kiss at parting?"

Mr. Troy smiled mysteriously, and changed the subject. His brief parting interview with the lady of the house was not of a nature to be rashly related. Miss Pink had not only positively assured him that her visitor was the most ill-bred woman she had ever met with, but had further accused Lady Lydiard of shaking her confidence in the aristocracy of her native country. "For the first time in my life," said Miss Pink, "I feel that something is to be said for the Republican point of view; and I am not indisposed to admit that the constitution of the United States *has* its advantages!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE conference between Lady Lydiard and Mr. Troy, on the way back to London, led to some practical results.

Hearing from her legal adviser that the inquiry after the missing money was for the moment at a standstill, Lady Lydiard made one of those bold suggestions with which she was accustomed to startle her friends in cases of emergency. She had heard favourable reports of the extraordinary ingenuity of the French police; and she now proposed sending to Paris for assistance, after first consulting her nephew, Mr. Felix Sweetsir. "Felix knows Paris as well as he knows London," she remarked. "He is an idle man, and it is quite likely that he will relieve us of all trouble by taking the matter into his own hands. In any case, he is sure to know who are the right people to address in our present necessity. What do you say?"

Mr. Troy, in reply, expressed his doubts as to the wisdom of employing foreigners in a delicate investigation which required an accurate knowledge of English customs and English character. Waiving this objection, he approved of the idea of consulting her Ladyship's nephew. "Mr. Sweetsir is a man of the world," he said. "In putting the case before him, we are sure to have it presented to us from a new point of view." Acting on this favourable expression of opinion, Lady

Lydiard wrote to her nephew. On the day after the visit to Miss Pink, the proposed council of three was held at Lady Lydiard's house.

Felix, never punctual in keeping an appointment, was even later than usual on this occasion. He made his apologies with his hand pressed on his forehead, and his voice expressive of the languor and discouragement of a suffering man.

"The beastly English climate is telling on my nerves," said Mr. Sweetsir—"the horrid weight of the atmosphere, after the exhilarating air of Paris; the intolerable dirt and dulness of London, you know. I was in bed, my dear aunt, when I received your letter. You may imagine the completely demoralised state I was in, when I tell you of the effect which the news of the robbery produced on me. I fell back on my pillow, as if I had been shot. Your Ladyship should really be a little more careful in communicating these disagreeable surprises to a sensitively-organised man. Never mind—my valet is a perfect treasure; he brought me some drops of ether on a lump of sugar. I said, 'Alfred' (his name is Alfred), 'put me into my clothes!' Alfred put me in. I assure you it reminded me of my young days, when I was put into my first pair of trousers. Has Alfred forgotten anything? Have I got my braces on? Have I come out in my shirt-sleeves? Well, dear aunt!—well, Mr. Troy!—what can I say? What can I do?"

Lady Lydiard, entirely without sympathy for nervous suffering, nodded to the lawyer. "You tell him," she said.

"I believe I speak for her Ladyship," Mr. Troy began, "when I say that we should like to hear, in

the first place, how the whole case strikes you, Mr. Sweetsir?"

"Tell it me all over again," said Felix.

Patient Mr. Troy told it all over again—and waited for the result.

"Well?" said Felix.

"Well?" said Mr. Troy. "Where does the suspicion of robbery rest in your opinion? You look at the theft of the bank note with a fresh eye."

"You mentioned a clergyman just now," said Felix. "The man, you know, to whom the money was sent. What was his name?"

"The Reverend Samuel Bradstock."

"You want me to name the person whom I suspect?"

"Yes, if you please," said Mr. Troy.

"I suspect the Reverend Samuel Bradstock," said Felix.

"If you have come here to make stupid jokes," interposed Lady Lydiard, "you had better go back to your bed again. We want a serious opinion."

"You *have* a serious opinion," Felix coolly rejoined. "I never was more in earnest in my life. Your Ladyship is not aware of the first principle to be adopted in cases of suspicion. One proceeds on what I will call the exhaustive system of reasoning. Thus:—Does suspicion point to the honest servants down stairs? No. To your Ladyship's adopted daughter? Appearances are against the poor girl; but you know her better than to trust to appearances. Are you suspicious of Moody? No. Of Hardyman—who was in the house at the time? Ridiculous! But I was in the house at the time, too. Do you suspect Me? Just so!

That idea is ridiculous, too. Now let us sum up. Servants, adopted daughter, Moody, Hardyman, Sweetsir—all beyond suspicion. Who is left? The Reverend Samuel Bradstock!"

This ingenious exposition of "the exhaustive system of reasoning" failed to produce any effect on Lady Lydiard. "You are wasting our time," she said sharply. "You know as well as I do that you are talking nonsense."

"I don't," said Felix. "Taking the gentlemanly professions all round, I know of no men who are so eager to get money, and who have so few scruples about how they get it, as the parsons. Where is there a man in any other profession who perpetually worries you for money?—who holds the bag under your nose for money?—who sends his clerk round from door to door to beg a few shillings of you, and calls it an 'Easter offering?' The parson does all this. Bradstock is a parson. I put it logically. Bowl me over, if you can!"

Mr. Troy attempted to "bowl him over," nevertheless. Lady Lydiard wisely interposed.

"When a man persists in talking nonsense," she said, "silence is the best answer; anything else only encourages him." She turned to Felix. "I have a question to ask you," she went on. "You will either give me a serious reply, or wish me good morning." With this brief preface, she made her inquiry as to the wisdom and possibility of engaging the services of the French police.

Felix took exactly the view of the matter which had been already expressed by Mr. Troy. "Superior in intelligence," he said, "but not superior in courage,

to the English police. Capable of performing wonders on their own ground and among their own people. But, my dear aunt, the two most dissimilar nations on the face of the earth are the English and the French. The French police may speak our language—but they are incapable of understanding our national character and our national manners. Set them to work on a private inquiry in the city of Pekin—and they would get on in time with the Chinese people. Set them to work in the city of London—and the English people would remain, from first to last, the same impenetrable mystery to them. In my belief, the London Sunday would be enough of itself to drive them back to Paris in despair. No balls, no concerts, no theatres, not even a museum or a picture-gallery open; every shop shut up but the gin-shop; and nothing moving but the church bells and the men who sell the penny ices. Hundreds of Frenchmen come to see me on their first arrival in England. Every man of them rushes back to Paris on the second Saturday of his visit, rather than confront the horrors of a second Sunday in London! However, you can try it, if you like. Send me a written abstract of the case, and I will forward it to one of the official people in the Rue Jerusalem, who will do anything he can to oblige me. Of course," said Felix, turning to Mr. Troy, "some of you have got the number of the lost bank-note? If the thief has tried to pass it in Paris, my man may be of some use to you."

"Three of us have got the number of the note," answered Mr. Troy; "Miss Isabel Miller, Mr. Moody, and myself."

"Very good," said Felix. "Send me the number, with the abstract of the case. Is there anything else

I can do towards recovering the money?" he asked, turning to his aunt. "There is one lucky circumstance in connection with this loss — isn't there? It has fallen on a person who is rich enough to take it easy. Good Heavens! suppose it had been *my* loss!"

"It has fallen doubly on me," said Lady Lydiard; "and I am certainly not rich enough to take *that* easy. The money was destined to a charitable purpose; and I have felt it my duty to pay it again."

Felix rose and approached his aunt's chair with faltering steps, as became a suffering man. He took Lady Lydiard's hand and kissed it with enthusiastic admiration.

"You excellent creature!" he said. "You may not think it, but you reconcile me to human nature. How generous! how noble! I think I'll go to bed again, Mr. Troy, if you really don't want any more of me. My head feels giddy and my legs tremble under me. It doesn't matter; I shall feel easier when Alfred has taken me out of my clothes again. God bless you, my dear aunt! I never felt so proud of being related to you as I do to-day. Good morning, Mr. Troy! Don't forget the abstract of the case; and don't trouble yourself to see me to the door. I dare say I shan't tumble down stairs; and, if I do, there's the porter in the hall to pick me up again. Enviable porter! as fat as butter and as idle as a pig! Au revoir! au revoir!" He kissed his hand, and drifted feebly out of the room. Sweetsir, one might say, in a state of eclipse; but still the serviceable Sweetsir, who was never consulted in vain by the fortunate people privileged to call him friend!

"Is he really ill, do you think?" Mr. Troy asked.

"My nephew has turned fifty," Lady Lydiard answered, "and he persists in living as if he was a young man. Every now and then Nature says to him, 'Felix, you are old!' And Felix goes to bed, and says it's his nerves."

"I suppose he is to be trusted to keep his word about writing to Paris?" pursued the lawyer.

"Oh, yes! He may delay doing it; but he will do it. In spite of his lackadaisical manner, he has moments of energy that would surprise you. Talking of surprises, I have something to tell you about Moody. Within the last day or two there has been a marked change in him—a change for the worse."

"You astonish me, Lady Lydiard! In what way has Moody deteriorated?"

"You shall hear. Yesterday was Friday. You took him out with you, on business, early in the morning."

Mr. Troy bowed, and said nothing. He had not thought it desirable to mention the interview at which old Sharon had cheated him of his guinea.

"In the course of the afternoon," pursued Lady Lydiard, "I happened to want him, and I was informed that Moody had gone out again. I asked where he had gone. Nobody knew. Had he left word when he would be back? He had left no message of any sort. Of course, he is not in the position of an ordinary servant. I don't expect him to ask permission to go out. But I do expect him to leave word down stairs of the time at which he is likely to return. When he did come back, after an absence of some hours, I naturally asked for an explanation. Would you believe it? he simply informed me that

he had been away on business of his own; expressed no regret, and offered no explanation—in short, spoke as if he was an independent gentleman. You may not think it, but I kept my temper. I merely remarked that I hoped it would not happen again. He made me a bow, and he said, 'My business is not completed yet, my Lady. I cannot guarantee that it may not call me away again at a moment's notice.' What do you think of that? Nine people out of ten would have given him warning to leave their service. I begin to think I am a wonderful woman—I only pointed to the door. One does hear sometimes of men's brains softening in the most unexpected manner. I have my suspicions of Moody's brains, I can tell you."

Mr. Troy's suspicions took a different direction: they pointed along the line of streets which led to old Sharon's lodgings. Discreetly silent as to the turn which his thoughts had taken, he merely expressed himself as feeling too much surprised to offer any opinion at all.

"Wait a little," said Lady Lydiard, "I haven't done surprising you yet. You have seen a boy here in a page's livery, I think? Well, he is a good boy; and he has gone home for a week's holiday with his friends. The proper person to supply his place with the boots and shoes and other small employments, is of course the youngest footman, a lad of only a few years older than himself. What do you think Moody does? Engages a stranger, with the house full of idle men-servants already, to fill the page's place. At intervals this morning I heard them wonderfully merry in the servants' hall—*so* merry that the noise and laughter found its way up stairs to the breakfast-room.

I like my servants to be in good spirits; but it certainly did strike me that they were getting beyond reasonable limits. I questioned my maid, and was informed that the noise was all due to the jokes of the strangest old man that ever was seen. In other words, to the person whom my steward had taken it on himself to engage in the page's absence. I spoke to Moody on the subject. He answered in an odd, confused way, that he had exercised his discretion to the best of his judgment, and that (if I wished it), he would tell the old man to keep his good spirits under better control. I asked him how he came to hear of the man. He only answered, 'By accident, my Lady' —and not one word more could I get out of him, good or bad. Moody engages the servants, as you know; but on every other occasion he has invariably consulted me before an engagement was settled. I really don't feel at all sure about this person who has been so strangely introduced into the house—he may be a drunkard or a thief. I wish you would speak to Moody yourself, Mr. Troy. Do you mind ringing the bell?"

Mr. Troy rose, as a matter of course, and rang the bell.

He was by this time, it is needless to say, convinced that Moody had not only gone back to consult old Sharon on his own responsibility, but, worse still, had taken the unwarrantable liberty of introducing him, as a spy, into the house. To communicate this explanation to Lady Lydiard would, in her present humour, be simply to produce the dismissal of the steward from her service. The only other alternative was to ask leave to interrogate Moody privately, and,

after duly reproving him, to insist on the departure of old Sharon as the one condition on which Mr. Troy would consent to keep Lady Lydiard in ignorance of the truth.

"I think I shall manage better with Moody, if your Ladyship will permit me to see him in private," the lawyer said. "Shall I go down stairs and speak to him in his own room?"

"Why should you trouble yourself to do that?" said her Ladyship. "See him here; and I will go into the boudoir."

As she made that reply the footman appeared at the drawing-room door.

"Send Moody here," said Lady Lydiard.

The footman's answer, delivered at that moment, assumed an importance which was not expressed in the footman's words. "My Lady," he said, "Mr. Moody has gone out."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHILE the strange proceedings of the steward were the subject of conversation between Lady Lydiard and Mr. Troy, Moody was alone in his room, occupied in writing to Isabel. Being unwilling that any eyes but his own should see the address, he had himself posted his letter; the time that he had chosen for leaving the house proving, unfortunately, to be also the time proposed by her Ladyship for his interview with the lawyer. In ten minutes after the footman had reported his absence, Moody returned. It was then too late to present himself in the drawing-room. In the interval, Mr. Troy had taken his leave, and Moody's position had dropped a degree lower in Lady Lydiard's estimation.

Isabel received her letter by the next morning's post. If any justification of Mr. Troy's suspicions had been needed, the terms in which Moody wrote would have amply supplied it.

"Dear Isabel (I hope I may call you 'Isabel' without offending you, in your present trouble?),—I have a proposal to make, which, whether you accept it or not, I beg you will keep a secret from every living creature but ourselves. You will understand my request, when I add that these lines relate to the matter of tracing the stolen bank-note.

"I have been privately in communication with a person in London, who is, as I believe, the one person

competent to help us in gaining our end. He has already made many inquiries in private. With some of them I am acquainted; the rest he has thus far kept to himself. The person to whom I allude particularly wishes to have half an hour's private conversation with you—in my presence. I am bound to warn you that he is a very strange and very ugly old man; and I can only hope that you will look over his personal appearance in consideration of what he is likely to do for you.

"Can you conveniently meet us at the further end of the row of villas in which your aunt lives the day after to-morrow, at four o'clock? Let me have one line to say, if you will keep the appointment, and if the hour named will suit you. And believe me, your devoted friend and servant,

"ROBERT MOODY."

The lawyer's warning to her to be careful how she yielded too readily to any proposal of Moody's recurred to Isabel's mind while she read those lines. Being pledged to secresy, she could not consult Mr. Troy—she was left to decide for herself.

No obstacle stood in the way of her free choice of alternatives. After their early dinner at three o'clock, Miss Pink habitually retired to her own room "to meditate," as she expressed it. Her "meditations" invariably ended in a sound sleep of some hours; and during that interval Isabel was at liberty to do as she pleased. After considerable hesitation, her implicit belief in Moody's truth and devotion, assisted by a strong feeling of curiosity to see the companion with whom

the steward had associated himself, decided Isabel on consenting to keep the appointment.

Taking up her position beyond the houses, on the day and at the hour mentioned by Moody, she believed herself to be fully prepared for the most unfavourable impression which the most disagreeable of all possible strangers could produce.

But the first appearance of old Sharon—as dirty as ever, clothed in a long, frowsy, grey over-coat, with his pug-dog at his heels, and his smoke-blackened pipe in his mouth; with a tall white hat on his head, which looked as if it had been picked up in a gutter, a hideous leer in his eyes, and a jaunty trip in his walk—took her so completely by surprise that she could only return Moody's friendly greeting by silently pressing his hand. As for Moody's companion, to look at him for a second time was more than she had resolution to do. She kept her eyes fixed on the pug-dog, and with good reason: so far as appearances went, he was indisputably the nobler animal of the two.

Under the circumstances, the interview threatened to begin in a very embarrassing manner. Moody, disheartened by Isabel's silence, made no attempt to set the conversation going; he looked as if he meditated a hasty retreat to the railway station which he had just left. Fortunately, he had at his side the right man (for once) in the right place. Old Sharon's effrontery was equal to any emergency.

"I am not a nice-looking old man, my dear, am I?" he said, leering at Isabel with cunning, half-closed eyes. "Bless your heart! you'll soon get used to me! You see, I am the sort of colour, as they say at the linen-drapers', that doesn't wash well. It's all through

love; upon my life it is! Early in this present century I had my young affections blighted; and I've neglected myself ever since. Disappointment takes different forms, Miss, in different men. I don't think I have had heart enough to brush my hair for the last fifty years. She was a magnificent woman, Mr. Moody, and she dropped me like a hot potato. Dreadful! dreadful! Let us pursue this painful subject no further. Ha! here's a pretty country! Here's a nice blue sky! I admire the country, Miss; I see so little of it, you know. Have you any objection to walk along into the fields? The fields, my dear, bring out all the poetry of my nature. Where's the dog? Here, Puggy! Puggy! hunt about, my man, and find some dog-grass. Does his inside good, you know, after a meat diet in London. Lord! how I feel my spirits rising in this fine air! Does my complexion look any brighter, Miss? Will you run a race with me, Mr. Moody, or will you oblige me with a back at leap-frog? I'm not mad, my dear young lady; I'm only merry. I live, you see, in the London stink; and the smell of the hedges and the wild flowers is too much for me at first. It gets into my head, it does. I'm drunk! As I live by bread, I'm drunk on fresh air! Oh! what a jolly day! Oh! how young and innocent I do feel!" Here his innocence got the better of him, and he began to sing, "'I wish I was a little fly, in my love's bosom for to lie!' Hullo! here we are on the nice soft grass! and, oh, my gracious! there's a a bank running down into a hollow! I can't stand that, you know. Mr. Moody, hold my hat, and take the greatest care of it. Here goes for a roll down the bank!"

He handed his horrible hat to the astonished Moody,

laid himself flat on the top of the bank, and deliberately rolled down it, exactly as he might have done when he was a boy. The tails of his long grey coat flew madly in the wind: the dog pursued him, jumping over him, and barking with delight; he shouted and screamed in answer to the dog, as he rolled over and over faster and faster; and, when he got up, on the level ground, and called out cheerfully to his companions standing above him, "I say, you two, I feel twenty years younger already!"—human gravity could hold out no longer. The sad and silent Moody smiled, and Isabel burst into fits of laughter.

"There," he said, "didn't I tell you you would get used to me, Miss? There's a deal of life left in the old man yet—is n't there? Shy me down my hat, Mr. Moody. And now we'll get to business!" He turned round to the dog still barking at his heels. "Business, Puggy!" he called out sharply, and Puggy instantly shut up his mouth, and said no more.

"Well, now," old Sharon resumed, when he had joined his friends and had got his breath again, "let's have a little talk about yourself, Miss. Has Mr. Moody told you who I am, and what I want with you? Very good. May I offer you my arm? No! You like to be independent, don't you? All right—I don't object. I am an amiable old man, I am. About this Lady Lydiard, now? Suppose you tell me how you first got acquainted with her?"

In some surprise at this question, Isabel told her little story. Observing Sharon's face while she was speaking, Moody saw that he was not paying the smallest attention to the narrative. His sharp, shameless black eyes watched the girl's face absently; his gross

lips curled upwards in a sardonic and self-satisfied smile. He was evidently setting a trap for her of some kind. Without a word of warning—while Isabel was in the middle of a sentence—the trap opened, with the opening of old Sharon's lips.

"I say!" he burst out. "How came *you* to seal her Ladyship's letter—eh?"

The question bore no sort of relation, direct or undirect, to what Isabel happened to be saying at the moment. In the sudden surprise of hearing it, she started and fixed her eyes in astonishment on Sharon's face. The old vagabond chuckled to himself. "Did you see that?" he whispered to Moody. "I beg your pardon, Miss," he went on; "I won't interrupt you again. Lord, how interesting it is!—aint it, Mr. Moody? Please to go on, Miss."

But Isabel, though she spoke with perfect sweetness and temper, declined to go on. "I had better tell you, Sir, how I came to seal her Ladyship's letter," she said. "If I may venture on giving my opinion, *that* part of my story seems to be the only part of it which relates to your business with me to-day."

Without further preface she described the circumstances which had led to her assuming the perilous responsibility of sealing the letter. Old Sharon's wandering attention began to wander again: he was evidently occupied in setting another trap. For the second time he interrupted Isabel in the middle of a sentence. Suddenly stopping short, he pointed to some sheep, at the farther end of the field through which they happened to be passing at the moment.

"There's a pretty sight!" he said. "There are the innocent sheep a-feeding—all following each other as

usual. And there's the sly dog waiting behind the gate till the sheep want his services. Reminds me of old Sharon and the public!" He chuckled over his discovery of the remarkable similarity between the sheep-dog and himself, and the sheep and the public —and then burst upon Isabel with a second question. "I say! didn't you look at the letter before you sealed it?"

"Certainly not!" Isabel answered.

"Not even at the address?"

"No."

"Thinking of something else—eh?"

"Very likely," said Isabel.

"Was it your new bonnet, my dear?"

Isabel laughed. "Women are not always thinking of their new bonnets," she answered.

Old Sharon, to all appearance, dropped the subject there. He lifted his lean brown forefinger and pointed again—this time to a house at a short distance from them. "That's a farm-house, surely?" he said. "I'm thirsty, after my roll down the hill. Do you think, Miss, they would give me a drink of milk?"

"I am sure they would," said Isabel. "I know the people. Shall I go and ask them?"

"Thank you, my dear. One word more, before you go. About the sealing of that letter? What *could* you have been thinking of while you were doing it?" He looked hard at her, and took her suddenly by the arm. "Was it your sweetheart?" he asked, in a whisper.

The question instantly reminded Isabel that she had been thinking of Hardyman while she sealed the letter. She blushed as the remembrance crossed her

mind. Robert, noticing her embarrassment, spoke sharply to old Sharon. "You have no right to put such a question to a young lady," he said. "Be a little more careful for the future."

"There! there! don't be hard on me," pleaded the old rogue. "An ugly old man like me may make his innocent little joke—eh, Miss? I'm sure you're too sweet-tempered to be angry when I meant no offence. Show me that you bear no malice. Go, like a forgiving young angel, and ask for the milk."

Nobody appealed to Isabel's sweetness of temper in vain. "I will do it with pleasure," she said—and hastened away to the farm-house.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE instant Isabel was out of hearing, old Sharon slapped Moody on the shoulder to rouse his attention. "I've got her out of the way," he said, "now listen to me. My business with the young angel is done—I may go back to London."

Moody looked at him in astonishment.

"Lord! how little you know of thieves!" exclaimed old Sharon. "Why, man alive, I have tried her with two plain tests! If you wanted a proof of her innocence, there it was, as plain as the nose in your face. Did you hear me ask her how she came to seal the letter—just when her mind was running on something else?"

"I heard you," said Moody.

"Did you see how she started and stared at me?"

"I did."

"Well, I can tell you this—if she *had* stolen the money she would neither have started nor stared. She would have had her answer ready beforehand in her own mind, in case of accidents. There's only one thing in my experience that you can never do with a thief, when the thief happens to be a woman—you can never take her by surprise. Put that remark by in your mind: one day you may find a use for remembering it. Did you see her blush, and look quite hurt in her feelings, pretty dear, when I asked about her sweetheart? Do you think a thief, in her place, would have

shown such a face as that? Not she! The thief would have been relieved. The thief would have said to herself, 'All right! the more the old fool talks about sweethearts the further he is from tracing the robbery to Me!' Yes! yes! the ground's cleared now, Master Moody. I've reckoned up the servants; I've questioned Miss Isabel; I've made my inquiries in all the other quarters that may be useful to us—and what's the result? The advice I gave, when you and the lawyer first came to me—I hate that fellow!—remains as sound and good advice as ever. I have got the thief in my mind," said old Sharon, closing his cunning eyes and then opening them again, "as plain as I've got you in my eye at this minute. No more of that now," he went on, looking round sharply at the path that led to the farm-house, "I've something particular to say to you—and there's barely time to say it before that nice girl comes back. Look here! Do you happen to be acquainted with Mr.-Honourable-Hardyman's valet?"

Moody's eyes rested on old Sharon with a searching and doubtful look.

"Mr. Hardyman's valet?" he repeated. "I wasn't prepared to hear Mr. Hardyman's name."

Old Sharon looked at Moody, in his turn, with a flash of sardonic triumph.

"Oho!" he said. "Has my good boy learnt his lesson? Do you see the thief through my spectacles, already?"

"I began to see him," Moody answered, "when you gave us the guinea opinion at your lodgings."

"Will you whisper his name?" asked old Sharon.

"Not yet. I distrust my own judgment. I'll wait till time proves that you're right."

Old Sharon knitted his shaggy brows and shook his head. "If you only had a little more dash and go in you," he said, "you would be a clever fellow. As it is——!" He finished the sentence by snapping his fingers with a grin of contempt. "Let's get to business. Are you going back by the next train along with me? or are you going to stop with the young lady?"

"I will follow you by a later train," Moody answered.

"Then I must give you your instructions at once," Sharon continued. "You get better acquainted with Hardyman's valet. Lend him money, if he wants it—stick at nothing to make a bosom friend of him. I can't do that part of it; my appearance would be against me. *You* are the man—you are respectable from the top of your hat to the tips of your boots; nobody would suspect You. Don't make objections! Can you fix the valet? Or can't you?"

"I can try," said Moody. "And what then?"

Old Sharon put his gross lips disagreeably close to Moody's ear.

"Your friend the valet can tell you who his master's bankers are," he said; "and he can supply you with a specimen of his master's handwriting."

Moody drew back, as suddenly as if his vagabond companion had put a knife at his throat. "You old villain!" he said. "Are you tempting me to forgery?"

"You infernal fool!" retorted Old Sharon. "*Will* you hold that long tongue of yours, and hear what I have to say? You go to Hardyman's bankers, with a note in Hardyman's handwriting (exactly imitated by me) to this effect:—'Mr. H. presents his compliments

to Messrs. So-and-So, and is not quite certain whether a payment of five hundred pounds has been made within the last week to his account. He will be much obliged if Messrs. So-and-So will inform him by a line in reply, whether there is such an entry to his credit in their books, and by whom the payment has been made.' You wait for the banker's answer, and bring it to me. It's just possible that the name you're afraid to whisper may appear in the letter. If it does, we've caught our man. Is *that* forgery, Mr. Muddlehead Moody? I'll tell you what—if I had lived to be your age, and knew no more of the world than you do, I'd go and hang myself. Steady! here's our charming friend with the milk. Remember your instructions, and don't lose heart if my notion of the payment to the bankers comes to nothing. I know what to do next, in that case—and, what's more, I'll take all the risk and trouble on my own shoulders. Oh, Lord! I'm afraid I shall be obliged to drink the milk, now it's come!"

With this apprehension in his mind, he advanced to relieve Isabel of the jug that she carried.

"Here's a treat!" he burst out, with an affectation of joy, which was completely belied by the expression of his dirty face. "Here's a kind and dear young lady, to help an old man to a drink with her own pretty hands." He paused, and looked at the milk very much as he might have looked at a dose of physic. "Will anyone take a drink first?" he asked, offering the jug piteously to Isabel and Moody. "You see, I'm not used to genuine milk; I'm used to chalk and water. I don't know what effect the unadulterated cow might have on my poor old inside." He tasted

the milk with the greatest caution. "Upon my soul, this is too rich for me! The unadulterated cow is a deal too strong to be drunk alone. If you'll allow me, I'll qualify it with a drop of gin. Here, Puggy, Puggy!" He set the milk down before the dog; and, taking a flask out of his pocket, emptied it at a draught. "That's something like!" he said, smacking his lips with an air of infinite relief. "So sorry, Miss, to have given you all your trouble for nothing; it's my ignorance that's to blame, not me. I couldn't know I was unworthy of genuine milk till I tried—could I? And do you know," he proceeded, with his eye directed slyly on the way back to the station, "I begin to think I'm not worthy of the fresh air, either. A kind of a longing seems to come over me for the London stink. I'm home-sick already for the soot of my happy childhood and my own dear native mud. The air here is too thin for me, and the sky's too clean; and—oh, Lord! —when you're used to the roar of the traffic—the 'busses and the cabs and what not—the silence in these parts is downright awful. I'll wish you good evening, Miss; and get back to London."

Isabel turned to Moody with disappointment plainly expressed in her face and manner.

"Is that all he has to say?" she asked. "You told me he could help us. You led me to suppose he could find the guilty person?"

Sharon heard her. "I could name the guilty person," he answered, "as easily, Miss, as I could name you."

"Why don't you do it, then?" Isabel inquired, not very patiently.

"Because the time's not ripe for it yet, Miss—that's

one reason. Because, if I mentioned the thief's name, as things are now, you, Miss Isabel, would think me mad; and you would tell Mr. Moody I had cheated him out of his money—that's another reason. The matter's in train, if you will only wait a little longer."

"So you say," Isabel rejoined. "If you really could name the thief, I believe you would do it now."

She turned away with a frown on her pretty face. Old Sharon followed her. Even his coarse sensibilities appeared to feel irresistible ascendancy of beauty and youth.

"I say!" he began, "we must part friends, you know—or I shall break my heart over it. They have got milk at the farm-house. Do you think they have got pen, ink, and paper too?"

Isabel answered, without turning to look at him, "Of course they have!"

"And a bit of sealing-wax?"

"I dare say!"

Old Sharon laid his dirty claws on her shoulder, and forced her to face him as the best means of shaking them off.

"Come along!" he said. "I am going to pacify you with some information in writing."

"Why should you write it?" Isabel asked suspiciously.

"Because I mean to make my own conditions, my dear, before I let you into the secret."

In ten minutes more they were all three in the farm-house parlour. Nobody but the farmer's wife was at home. The good woman trembled from head to foot at the sight of old Sharon. In all her harmless life she had never yet seen humanity under the aspect

in which it was now presented to her. "Mercy preserve us, Miss!" she whispered to Isabel, "how come you to be in such company as *that?*" Instructed by Isabel, she produced the necessary materials for writing and sealing—and, that done, she shrank away to the door. "Please to excuse me, Miss," she said, with a last horrified look at her venerable visitor; "I really can't stand the sight of such a blot of dirt as that in my nice clean parlour." With those words she disappeared, and was seen no more.

Perfectly indifferent to his reception, old Sharon wrote; inclosed what he had written in an envelope; and sealed it (in the absence of anything better fitted for his purpose) with the mouth-piece of his pipe.

"Now, Miss," he said, "you give me your word of honour"—he stopped and looked round at Moody with a grin—"and you give me yours, that you won't either of you break the seal on this envelope till the expiration of one week from the present day. There are the conditions, Miss Isabel, on which I'll give you your information. If you stop to dispute with me, the candle's alight, and I'll burn the letter!"

It was useless to contend with him. Isabel and Moody gave him the promise that he required. He handed the sealed envelope to Isabel with a low bow. "When the week's out," he said, "you will own I'm a cleverer fellow than you think me now. Wish you good evening, Miss. Come along, Puggy! Farewell to the horrid clean country, and back again to the nice London stink!"

He nodded to Moody—he leered at Isabel—he chuckled to himself—he left the farm-house.

CHAPTER XV.

ISABEL looked down at the letter in her hand—considered it in silence—and turned to Moody. "I feel tempted to open it already," she said.

"After giving your promise?" Moody gently remonstrated.

Isabel met that objection with a woman's logic.

"Does a promise matter," she asked, "when one gives it to a dirty, disreputable, presuming old wretch like Mr. Sharon? It's a wonder to me that you trust such a creature *I* wouldn't!"

"I doubted him just as you do," Moody answered, "when I first saw him in company with Mr. Troy. But there was something in the advice he gave us at that first consultation which altered my opinion of him for the better. I dislike his appearance and his manners as much as you do—I may even say I felt ashamed of bringing such a person to see you. And yet I can't think that I have acted unwisely in employing Mr. Sharon."

Isabel listened absently. She had something more to say, and she was considering how she should say it. "May I ask you a bold question?" she began.

"Any question you like."

"Have you——" she hesitated and looked embarrassed. "Have you paid Mr. Sharon much money?" she resumed, suddenly rallying her courage. Instead of answering, Moody suggested that it was time to

think of returning to Miss Pink's villa. "Your aunt may be getting anxious about you," he said.

Isabel led the way out of the farm-house in silence. She reverted to Mr. Sharon and the money, however, as they returned by the path across the fields.

"I am sure you will not be offended with me," she said gently, "if I own that I am uneasy about the expenses. I am allowing you to use your purse as if it was mine—and I have hardly any savings of my own."

Moody entreated her not to speak of it. "How can I put my money to a better use than in serving your interests?" he asked. "My one object in life is to relieve you of your present anxieties. I shall be the happiest man living if you only owe a moment's happiness to my exertions!"

Isabel took his hand, and looked at him with grateful tears in her eyes.

"How good you are to me, Mr. Moody!" she said. "I wish I could tell you how deeply I feel your kindness."

"You can do it easily," he answered, with a smile. "Call me 'Robert'—don't call me 'Mr. Moody.'"

She took his arm with a sudden familiarity that charmed him. "If you had been my brother I should have called you 'Robert,'" she said; "and no brother could have been more devoted to me than you are."

He looked eagerly at her bright face turned up to his. "May I never hope to be something nearer and dearer to you than a brother?" he asked, timidly.

She hung her head, and said nothing. Moody's memory recalled Sharon's coarse reference to her "sweetheart." She had blushed when he put the

question. What had she done when Moody put *his* question? Her face answered for her—she had turned pale; she was looking more serious than usual. Ignorant as he was of the ways of women, his instinct told him that this was a bad sign. Surely her rising colour would have confessed it, if time and gratitude together were teaching her to love him? He sighed as the inevitable conclusion forced itself on his mind.

"I hope I have not offended you?" he said, sadly.

"Oh, no."

"I wish I had not spoken. Pray don't think that I am serving you with any selfish motive."

"I don't think that, Robert. I never could think it of *you*."

He was not quite satisfied yet. "Even if you were to marry some other man," he went on, earnestly, "it would make no difference in what I am trying to do for you. No matter what I might suffer, I should still go on—for your sake."

"Why do you talk so?" she burst out, passionately. "No other man has such a claim as yours to my gratitude and regard. How can you let such thoughts come to you? I have done nothing in secret. I have no friends who are not known to you. Be satisfied with that, Robert—and let us drop the subject."

"Never to take it up again?" he asked, with the infatuated pertinacity of a man clinging to his last hope.

At other times and under other circumstances Isabel might have answered him sharply. She spoke with perfect gentleness now.

"Not for the present," she said. "I don't know my own heart. Give me time."

His gratitude caught at those words, as the drowning man is said to catch at the proverbial straw. He lifted her hand, and suddenly and fondly pressed his lips on it. She showed no confusion. Was she sorry for him, poor wretch!—and was that all?

They walked on, arm-in-arm, in silence.

Crossing the last field, they entered again on the high road leading to the row of villas in which Miss Pink lived. The minds of both were preoccupied. Neither of them noticed a gentleman approaching on horseback, followed by a mounted groom. He was advancing slowly, at the walking-pace of his horse, and he only observed the two foot-passengers when he was close to them.

"Miss Isabel!"

She started, looked up, and discovered—Alfred Hardyman.

He was dressed in a perfectly-made travelling suit of light brown, with a peaked felt hat of a darker shade of the same colour, which, in a picturesque sense, greatly improved his personal appearance. His pleasure at discovering Isabel gave the animation to his features which they wanted on ordinary occasions. He sat his horse, a superb hunter, easily and gracefully. His light amber-coloured gloves fitted him perfectly. His obedient servant, on another magnificent horse, waited behind him. He looked the impersonation of rank and breeding—of wealth and prosperity. What a contrast, in a woman's eyes, to the shy, pale, melancholy man, in the ill-fitting black clothes, with the wandering uneasy glances, who stood beneath him, and felt, and showed that he felt, his inferior position keenly! In spite of herself, the treacherous blush flew

over Isabel's face, in Moody's presence, and with Moody's eyes distrustfully watching her.

"This is a piece of good fortune that I hardly hoped for," said Hardyman, his cool, quiet, dreary way of speaking quickened, as usual, in Isabel's presence. "I only got back from France this morning, and I called on Lady Lydiard in the hope of seeing you. She was not at home—and you were in the country—and the servants didn't know the address. I could get nothing out of them, except that you were on a visit to a relation." He looked at Moody while he was speaking. "Haven't I seen you before?" he said, carelessly. "Yes; at Lady Lydiard's. You're her steward, are you not? How d'ye do?" Moody, with his eyes on the ground, answered silently by a bow. Hardyman, perfectly indifferent whether Lady Lydiard's steward spoke or not, turned on his saddle, and looked admiringly at Isabel. "I begin to think my luck has turned at last," he went on, with a smile. "I was jogging along to my farm, and despairing of ever seeing Miss Isabel again—and Miss Isabel herself meets me at the roadside! I wonder whether you are as glad to see me as I am to see you? You won't tell me—eh? May I ask you something else? Are you staying in our neighbourhood?"

There was no alternative before Isabel but to answer this last question. Hardyman had met her out walking, and had no doubt drawn the inevitable inference—although he was too polite to say so in plain words.

"Yes, Sir," she answered, shyly; "I am staying in this neighbourhood."

"And who is your relation?" Hardyman proceeded, in his easy, matter-of-course way. "Lady Lydiard told

me, when I had the pleasure of meeting you at her house, that you had an aunt living in the country. I have a good memory, Miss Isabel, for anything that I hear about You! It's your aunt, isn't it? Yes? I know everybody about here. What is your aunt's name?"

Isabel, still resting her hand on Robert's arm, felt it tremble a little as Hardyman made this last inquiry. If she had been speaking to one of her equals she would have known how to dispose of the question without directly answering it. But what could she say to the magnificent gentleman on the stately horse? He had only to send his servant into the village to ask who the young lady from London was staying with, and the answer, in a dozen mouths at least, would direct him to her aunt. She cast one appealing look at Moody and pronounced the distinguished name of Miss Pink.

"Miss Pink?" Hardyman repeated. "Surely I know Miss Pink?" (He had not the faintest remembrance of her.) "Where did I meet her last?" (He ran over in his memory the different local festivals at which strangers had been introduced to him.) "Was it at the archery meeting? or at the grammar-school when the prizes were given? No? It must have been at the flower show, then, surely?"

It *had* been at the flower show. Isabel had heard it from Miss Pink fifty times at least, and was obliged to admit it now.

"I am quite ashamed of never having called," Hardyman proceeded. "The fact is, I have so much to do. I am a bad one at paying visits. Are you on

your way home? Let me follow you and make my apologies personally to Miss Pink."

Moody looked at Isabel. It was only a momentary glance, but she perfectly understood it.

"I am afraid, Sir, my aunt cannot have the honour of seeing you to-day," she said.

Hardyman was all compliance. He smiled, and patted his horse's neck. "To-morrow, then," he said. "My compliments, and I will call in the afternoon. Let me see; Miss Pink lives at——?" He waited, as if he expected Isabel to assist his treacherous memory once more. She hesitated again. Hardyman looked round at his groom. The groom could find out the address, even if he did not happen to know it already. Besides, there was the little row of houses visible at the farther end of the road. Isabel pointed to the villas, as a necessary concession to good manners, before the groom could anticipate her. "My aunt lives there, Sir; at the house called The Lawn."

"Ah! to be sure!" said Hardyman. "I oughtn't to have wanted reminding; but I have so many things to think of at the farm. And I am afraid I must be getting old—my memory isn't as good as it was. I am so glad to have seen you, Miss Isabel. You and your aunt must come and look at my horses. Do you like horses? Are you fond of riding? I have a quiet roan mare that is used to carrying ladies; she would be just the thing for you. Did I beg you to give my best compliments to your aunt? Yes? How well you are looking! our air here agrees with you. I hope I haven't kept you standing too long? I didn't think of it in the pleasure of meeting you. Good-bye, Miss Isabel; good-bye, till to-morrow!"

He took off his hat to Isabel, nodded to Moody, and pursued his way to the farm.

Isabel looked at her companion. His eyes were still on the ground. Pale, silent, motionless, he waited by her like a dog, until she gave the signal of walking on again towards the house.

"You are not angry with me for speaking to Mr. Hardyman?" she asked anxiously.

He lifted his head at the sound of her voice. "Angry with you, my dear! Why should I be angry?"

"You seem so changed, Robert, since we met Mr. Hardyman. I couldn't help speaking to him—could I?"

"Certainly not."

They moved on towards the villa. Isabel was still uneasy. There was something in Moody's silent submission to all that she said and all that she did which pained and humiliated her. "You're not jealous?" she said, smiling timidly.

He tried to speak lightly on his side. "I have no time to be jealous while I have your affairs to look after," he answered.

She pressed his arm tenderly. "Never fear, Robert, that new friends will make me forget the best and dearest friend who is now at my side." She paused, and looked up at him with a compassionate fondness that was very pretty to see. "I can keep out of the way to-morrow, when Mr. Hardyman calls," she said. "It is my aunt he is coming to see—not me."

It was generously meant. But, while her mind was only occupied with the present time, Moody's mind was looking into the future. He was learning the

hard lesson of self-sacrifice already. "Do what you think right," he said, quietly; "don't think of me."

They reached the gate of the villa. He held out his hand to say good-bye.

"Won't you come in?" she asked. "Do come in!"

"Not now, my dear. I must get back to London as soon as I can. There is some more work to be done for you, and the sooner I do it the better."

She heard his excuse without heeding it.

"You are not like yourself, Robert," she said. "Why is it? What are you thinking of?"

He was thinking of the bright blush that overspread her face when Hardyman first spoke to her; he was thinking of the invitation to her to see the stud-farm, and to ride the roan mare; he was thinking of the utterly powerless position in which he stood towards Isabel and towards the highly-born gentleman who admired her. But he kept his doubts and fears to himself. "The train won't wait for me," he said, and held out his hand once more.

She was not only perplexed; she was really distressed. "Don't take leave of me in that cold way!" she pleaded. Her eyes dropped before his, and her lips trembled a little. "Give me a kiss, Robert, at parting." She said those bold words softly and sadly, out of the depth of her pity for him. He started; his face brightened suddenly; his sinking hope rose again. In another moment the change came; in another moment he understood her. As he touched her cheek with his lips, he turned pale again. "Don't quite forget me," he said, in low faltering tones—and left her.

Miss Pink met Isabel in the hall. Refreshed by unbroken repose, the ex-schoolmistress was in the happiest frame of mind for the reception of her niece's news.

Informed that Moody had travelled to South Morden to personally report the progress of the inquiries, Miss Pink highly approved of him as a substitute for Mr. Troy. "Mr. Moody, as a banker's son, is a gentleman by birth," she remarked; "he has condescended, in becoming Lady Lydiard's steward. What I saw of him, when he came here with you, prepossessed me in his favour. He has my confidence, Isabel, as well as yours—he is in every respect a superior person to Mr. Troy. Did you meet any friends, my dear, when you were out walking?"

The answer to this question produced a species of transformation in Miss Pink. The rapturous rank-worship of her nation feasted, so to speak, on Hardyman's message. She looked taller and younger than usual—she was all smiles and sweetness. "At last, Isabel, you have seen birth and breeding under their right aspect," she said. "In the society of Lady Lydiard, you cannot possibly have formed correct ideas of the English aristocracy. Observe Mr. Hardyman when he does me the honour to call to-morrow—and you will see the difference."

"Mr. Hardyman is your visitor, aunt—not mine. I was going to ask you to let me remain upstairs in my room."

Miss Pink was unaffectedly shocked. "This is what you learn at Lady Lydiard's!" she observed. "No, Isabel, your absence would be a breach of good man-

ners—I cannot possibly permit it. You will be present to receive our distinguished friend with me. And mind this!" added Miss Pink, in her most impressive manner, "If Mr. Hardyman should by any chance ask why you have left Lady Lydiard, not one word about those disgraceful circumstances which connect you with the loss of the bank-note! I should sink into the earth if the smallest hint of what has really happened should reach Mr. Hardyman's ears. My child, I stand towards you in the place of your lamented mother; I have the right to command your silence on this horrible subject, and I do imperatively command it."

In these words foolish Miss Pink sowed the seed for the harvest of trouble that was soon to come.

CHAPTER XVI.

PAYING his court to the ex-schoolmistress on the next day, Hardyman made such excellent use of his opportunities that the visit to the stud-farm took place on the day after. His own carriage was placed at the disposal of Isabel and her aunt; and his own sister was present to confer special distinction on the reception of Miss Pink.

In a country like England, which annually suspends the sitting of its Legislature in honour of a horse-race, it is only natural and proper that the comfort of the horses should be the first object of consideration at a stud-farm. Nine tenths of the land at Hardyman's farm was devoted, in one way or another, to the noble quadruped with the low forehead and the long nose. Poor humanity was satisfied with second-rate and third-rate accommodation. The ornamental grounds, very poorly laid out, were also very limited in extent—and, as for the dwelling-house, it was literally a cottage. A parlour and a kitchen, a smoking-room, a bed-room, and a spare chamber for a friend, all scantily furnished, sufficed for the modest wants of the owner of the property. If you wished to feast your eyes on luxury you went to the stables.

The stud-farm being described, the introduction of Hardyman's sister follows in due course.

The Honourable Lavinia Hardyman was, as all persons in society know, married rather late in life to

General Drumblade. It is saying a great deal, but it is not saying too much, to describe Mrs. Drumblade as the most mischievous woman of her age in all England. Scandal was the breath of her life: to place people in false positions, to divulge secrets and destroy characters, to undermine friendships and aggravate enmities—these were the sources of enjoyment from which this dangerous woman drew the inexhaustible fund of good spirits that made her a brilliant light in the social sphere. She was one of the privileged sinners of modern society. The worst mischief that she could work was ascribed to her "exuberant vitality." She had that ready familiarity of manner which is (in her class) so rarely discovered to be insolence in disguise. Her power of easy self-assertion found people ready to accept her on her own terms wherever she went. She was one of those big, overpowering women, with blunt manners, voluble tongues, and goggle eyes, who carry everything before them. The highest society modestly considered itself in danger of being dull in the absence of Mrs. Drumblade. Even Hardyman himself—who saw as little of her as possible, whose frankly straightforward nature recoiled by instinct from contact with his sister—could think of no fitter person to make Miss Pink's reception agreeable to her, while he was devoting his own attentions to her niece. Mrs. Drumblade accepted the position thus offered with the most amiable readiness. In her own private mind she placed an interpretation on her brother's motives which did him the grossest injustice. She believed that Hardyman's designs on Isabel contemplated the most profligate result. To assist this purpose, while the girl's nearest relative was supposed to be taking care

of her, was Mrs. Drumblade's idea of "fun." Her worst enemies admitted that the honourable Lavinia had redeeming qualities, and owned that a keen sense of humour was one of her merits.

Was Miss Pink a likely person to resist the fascinations of Mrs. Drumblade? Alas! for the ex-schoolmistress! before she had been five minutes at the farm, Hardyman's sister had fished for her, caught her, landed her. Poor Miss Pink!

Mrs. Drumblade could assume a grave dignity of manner when the occasion called for it. She was grave, she was dignified, when Hardyman performed the ceremonies of introduction. She would not say she was charmed to meet Miss Pink—the ordinary slang of society was not for Miss Pink's ears—she would say she felt this introduction as a privilege. It was so seldom one met with persons of trained intellect in society. Mrs. Drumblade was already informed of Miss Pink's earlier triumphs in the instruction of youth. Mrs. Drumblade had not been blessed with children herself; but she had nephews and nieces, and she was anxious about their education, especially the nieces. What a sweet, modest girl Miss Isabel was! The fondest wish she could form for her nieces would be that they should resemble Miss Isabel when they grew up. The question was, as to the best method of education. She would own that she had selfish motives in becoming acquainted with Miss Pink. They were at the farm, no doubt, to see Alfred's horses. Mrs. Drumblade did not understand horses; her interest was in the question of education. She might even confess that she had accepted Alfred's invitation in the hope of hearing Miss Pink's views. There would be opportunities, she trusted,

for a little instructive conversation on that subject. It was, perhaps, ridiculous to talk, at her age, of feeling as if she was Miss Pink's pupil; and yet it exactly expressed the nature of the aspiration which was then in her mind. — In these terms, feeling her way with the utmost nicety, Mrs. Drumblade wound the net of flattery round and round Miss Pink until her hold on that innocent lady was, in every sense of the word, secure. Before half the horses had been passed under review, Hardyman and Isabel were out of sight, and Mrs. Drumblade and Miss Pink were lost in the intricacies of the stables. "Excessively stupid of me! We had better go back, and establish ourselves comfortably in the parlour. When my brother misses us, he and your charming niece will return to look for us in the cottage." Under cover of this arrangement the separation became complete. Miss Pink held forth on education to Mrs. Drumblade in the parlour; while Hardyman and Isabel were on their way to a paddock at the farthest limits of the property.

"I am afraid you are getting a little tired," said Hardyman. "Won't you take my arm?"

Isabel was on her guard: she had not forgotten what Lady Lydiard had said to her. "No, thank you, Mr. Hardyman; I am a better walker than you think."

Hardyman continued the conversation in his blunt, resolute way. "I wonder whether you will believe me," he asked, "if I tell you that this is one of the happiest days of my life?"

"I should think you were always happy," Isabel cautiously replied, "having such a pretty place to live in as this."

Hardyman met that answer with one of his quietly-positive denials. "A man is never happy by himself," he said. "He is happy with a companion. For instance, I am happy with you."

Isabel stopped and looked back. Hardyman's language was becoming a little too explicit. "Surely we have lost Mrs. Drumblade and my aunt?" she said. "I don't see them anywhere."

"You will see them directly; they are only a long way behind." With this assurance, he returned, in his own obstinate way, to his one object in view. "Miss Isabel, I want to ask you a question. I'm not a ladies' man. I speak my mind plainly to everybody—women included. Do you like being here to-day?"

Isabel's gravity was not proof against this very downright question. "I should be hard to please," she said, laughing, "if I didn't enjoy my visit to the farm."

Hardyman pushed steadily forward through the obstacle of the farm to the question of the farm's master. "You like being here," he repeated. "Do you like Me?"

This was serious. Isabel drew back a little, and looked at him. He waited with the most impenetrable gravity for her reply.

"I think you can hardly expect me to answer that question," she said.

"Why not?"

"Our acquaintance has been a very short one, Mr. Hardyman. And, if *you* are so good as to forget the difference between us, I think *I* ought to remember it."

"What difference?"

"The difference in rank."

Hardyman suddenly stood still, and emphasised his next words by digging his stick into the grass.

"If anything I have said has vexed you," he began, "tell me so plainly, Miss Isabel, and I'll ask your pardon. But don't throw my rank in my face. I cut adrift from all that nonsense when I took this farm and got my living out of the horses. What has a man's rank to do with a man's feelings?" he went on, with another emphatic dig of his stick. "I am quite serious in asking if you like me—for this good reason, that I like you. Yes, I do. You remember that day when I bled the old lady's dog—well, I have found out since then that there's a sort of incompleteness in my life which I never suspected before. It's you who have put that idea into my head. You didn't mean it, I dare say, but you have done it all the same. I sat alone here yesterday evening smoking my pipe—and I didn't enjoy it. I breakfasted alone this morning—and I didn't enjoy *that*. I said to myself, She's coming to lunch, that's one comfort—I shall enjoy lunch. That's what I feel, roughly described. I don't suppose I've been five minutes together without thinking of you, now in one way and now in another, since the day when I first saw you. When a man comes to my time of life, and has had my experience, he knows what that means. It means, in plain English, that his heart is set on a woman. You're the woman."

Isabel had thus far made several attempts to interrupt him, without success. But, when Hardyman's confession attained its culminating point, she insisted on being heard.

"If you will excuse me, Sir," she interposed, gravely, "I think I had better go back to the cottage. My aunt

is a stranger here, and she doesn't know where to look for us."

"We don't want your aunt," Hardyman remarked, in his most positive manner.

"We do want her," Isabel rejoined. "I won't venture to say it's wrong in you, Mr. Hardyman, to talk to me as you have just done, but I am quite sure it's wrong in me to listen."

He looked at her with such unaffected surprise and distress that she stopped, on the point of leaving him, and tried to make herself better understood.

"I had no intention of offending you, Sir," she said, a little confusedly. "I only wanted to remind you that there are some things which a gentleman in your position——." She stopped, tried to finish the sentence, failed, and began another. "If I had been a young lady in your own rank of life," she went on, "I might have thanked you for paying me a compliment, and have given you a serious answer. As it is, I am afraid I must say that you have surprised and disappointed me. I can claim very little for myself I know. But I did imagine—so long as there was nothing unbecoming in my conduct—that I had some right to your respect."

Listening more and more impatiently, Hardyman took her by the hand, and burst out with another of his abrupt questions.

"What can you possibly be thinking of?" he asked.

She gave him no answer; she only looked at him reproachfully, and tried to release herself.

Hardyman held her hand faster than ever.

"I believe you think me an infernal scoundrel!" he said. "I can stand a good deal, Miss Isabel, but I

can't stand *that*. How have I failed in respect towards you, if you please? I have told you you're the woman my heart is set on. Well? Isn't it plain what I want of you, when I say that? Isabel Miller, I want you to be my wife!"

Isabel's only reply to this extraordinary proposal of marriage was a faint cry of astonishment, followed by a sudden trembling that shook her from head to foot.

Hardyman put his arm round her with a gentleness which his oldest friend would have been surprised to see in him.

"Take your time to think of it," he said, dropping back again into his usual quiet tone. "If you had known me a little better you wouldn't have mistaken me, and you wouldn't be looking at me now as if you were afraid to believe your own ears. What is there so very wonderful in my wanting to marry you? I don't set up for being a saint. When I was a young man I was no better (and no worse) than other young men. I'm getting on now to middle life. I don't want romances and adventures—I want an easy existence with a nice lovable woman who will make me a good wife. You're the woman, I tell you again. I know it by what I've seen of you myself, and by what I have heard of you from Lady Lydiard. She said you were prudent, and sweet-tempered, and affectionate; to which I wish to add that you have just the face and figure that I like, and the modest manners and the blessed absence of all slang in your talk, which I don't find in the young women I meet with in the present day. That's my view of it: I think for myself. What does it matter to me whether you're the daughter of a Duke or the daughter of a Dairyman? It isn't your father I

want to marry—it's you. Listen to reason, there's a dear! We have only one question to settle before we go back to your aunt. You wouldn't answer me when I asked it a little while since. Will you answer now? *Do* you like me?"

Isabel looked up at him, timidly.

"In my position, Sir," she asked, "have I any right to like you? What would your relations and friends think, if I said Yes?"

Hardyman gave her waist a little admonitory squeeze with his arm.

"What! You're at it again? A nice way to answer a man, to call him 'Sir,' and to get behind his rank as if it was a place of refuge from him! I hate talking of myself, but you force me to it. Here is my position in the world—I have got an elder brother; he is married, and he has a son to succeed him in the title and the property. You understand, so far? Very well! Years ago I shifted my share of the rank (whatever it may be) on to my brother's shoulders. He's a thorough good fellow, and he has carried my dignity for me, without once dropping it, ever since. As for what people may say, they have said it already, from my father and mother downwards, in the time when I took to the horses and the farm. If they're the wise people I take them for, they won't be at the trouble of saying it all over again. No, no. Twist it how you may, Miss Isabel, whether I'm single or whether I'm married, I'm plain Alfred Hardyman; and everybody who knows me knows that I go on my own way, and please myself. If you don't like me, it will be the bitterest disappointment I ever had in my life; but say so honestly, all the same."

Where is the woman in Isabel's place whose capacity for resistance would not have yielded a little to such an appeal as this?

"I should be an insensible wretch," she replied warmly, "if I didn't feel the honour you have done me, and feel it gratefully."

"Does that mean you will have me for a husband?" asked downright Hardyman.

She was fairly driven into a corner; but (being a woman) she tried to slip through his fingers at the last moment.

"Will you forgive me," she said, "if I ask for a little more time? I am so bewildered, I hardly know what to say or do for the best. You see, Mr. Hardyman, it would be a dreadful thing for me to be the cause of your giving offence to your family. I am obliged to think of that. It would be so distressing for you (I will say nothing of myself) if your friends closed their doors on me. They might say I was a designing girl, who had taken advantage of your good opinion to raise herself in the world. Lady Lydiard warned me long since not to be ambitious about myself and not to forget my station in life, because she treated me like her adopted daughter. Indeed—indeed, I can't tell you how I feel your goodness, and the compliment—the very great compliment, you pay me! My heart is free; and if I followed my own inclinations"—— She checked herself, conscious that she was on the brink of saying to much. "Will you give me a few days," she pleaded, "to try if I can think composedly of all this? I am only a girl, and I feel quite dazzled by the prospect that you set before me."

Hardyman seized on these words as offering all the encouragement that he desired to his suit.

"Have your own way in this thing and in everything!" he said, with an unaccustomed fervour of language and manner. "I am so glad to hear that your heart is open to me, and that all your inclinations take my part."

Isabel instantly protested against this misrepresentation of what she had really said. "Oh, Mr. Hardyman, you quite mistake me!"

He answered her very much as he had answered Lady Lydiard, when she had tried to make him understand his proper relations towards Isabel.

"No, no; I don't mistake you. I agree to every word you say. How can I expect you to marry me, as you very properly remark, unless I give you a day or two to make up your mind? It's quite enough for me that you like the prospect. If Lady Lydiard treated you as her daughter, why shouldn't you be my wife? It stands to reason that you're quite right to marry a man who can raise you in the world. I like you to be ambitious—though Heaven knows it isn't much I can do for you, except to love you with all my heart. Still, it's a great encouragement to hear that her Ladyship's views agree with mine——"

"They don't agree, Mr. Hardyman!" protested poor Isabel. "You are entirely misrepresenting——"

Hardyman cordially concurred in this view of the matter. "Yes! yes! I can't pretend to represent her Ladyship's language, or yours either; I am obliged to take my words as they come to me. Don't disturb yourself: it's all right—I understand. You have made me the happiest man living. I shall ride over to-mor-

row to your aunt's house, and hear what you have to say to me. Mind you're at home! Not a day must pass now without my seeing you. I do love you, Isabel—I do indeed!" He stooped, and kissed her heartily. "Only to reward me," he explained, "for giving you time to think."

She drew herself away from him—resolutely, not angrily. Before she could make a third attempt to place the subject in its right light before him, the luncheon bell rang at the cottage—and a servant appeared, evidently sent to look for them.

"Don't forget to-morrow," Hardyman whispered confidentially. "I'll call early—and then go on to London, and get the ring."

CHAPTER XVII.

EVENTS succeeded each other rapidly, after the memorable day to Isabel of the luncheon at the farm.

On the next day (the ninth of the month) Lady Lydiard sent for her steward, and requested him to explain his conduct in repeatedly leaving the house without assigning any reason for his absence. She did not dispute his claims to a freedom of action, which would not be permitted to an ordinary servant. Her objection to his present course of proceeding related entirely to the mystery in which it was involved, and to the uncertainty in which the household was left as to the hour of his return. On those grounds, she thought herself entitled to an explanation. Moody's habitual reserve—strengthened, on this occasion, by

his dread of ridicule, if his efforts to serve Isabel ended in failure—disinclined him to take Lady Lydiard into his confidence, while his inquiries were still beset with obstacles and doubts. He respectfully entreated her Ladyship to grant him a delay of a few weeks before he entered on his explanation. Lady Lydiard's quick temper resented this request. She told Moody plainly that he was guilty of an act of presumption in making his own conditions with his employer. He received the reproof with exemplary resignation; but he held to his conditions nevertheless. From that moment the result of the interview was no longer in doubt. Moody was directed to send in his accounts. The accounts having been examined, and found to be scrupulously correct, he declined accepting the balance of salary that was offered to him. The next day he left Lady Lydiard's service.

On the tenth of the month her Ladyship received a letter from her nephew.

The health of Felix had not improved. He had made up his mind to go abroad again towards the end of the month. In the meantime, he had written to his friend at Paris, and he had the pleasure of forwarding an answer. The letter inclosed announced that the lost five-hundred-pound note had been made the subject of careful inquiry in Paris. It had not been traced. The French police offered to send to London one of their best men, well acquainted with the English language, if Lady Lydiard was desirous of employing him. He would be perfectly willing to act with an English officer in conducting the investigation, should it be thought necessary. Mr. Troy being consulted as to the expediency of accepting this proposal, objected to

the pecuniary terms demanded as being extravagantly high. He suggested waiting a little before any reply was sent to Paris; and he engaged meanwhile to consult a London solicitor who had great experience in cases of theft, and whose advice might enable them to dispense entirely with the services of the French police.

Being now a free man again, Moody was able to follow his own inclinations in regard to the instructions which he had received from old Sharon.

The course that had been recommended to him was repellent to the self-respect and the sense of delicacy which were among the inbred virtues of Moody's character. He shrank from forcing himself as a friend on Hardyman's valet; he recoiled from the idea of tempting the man to steal a specimen of his master's handwriting. After some consideration, he decided on applying to the agent who collected the rents at Hardyman's London chambers. Being an old acquaintance of Moody's, this person would certainly not hesitate to communicate the address of Hardyman's bankers, if he knew it. The experiment, tried under these favouring circumstances, proved perfectly successful. Moody proceeded to Sharon's lodgings the same day, with the address of the bankers in his pocket-book. The old vagabond, greatly amused by Moody's scruples, saw plainly enough that, so long as he wrote the supposed letter from Hardyman in the third person, it mattered little what handwriting was employed, seeing that no signature would be necessary. The letter was at once composed, on the model which Sharon had already suggested to Moody, and a respectable messenger (so far as outward appearance went) was employed to take

it to the bank. In half an hour the answer came back. It added one more to the difficulties which beset the inquiry after the lost money. No such sum as five hundred pounds had been paid, within the dates mentioned, to the credit of Hardyman's account.

Old Sharon was not in the least discomposed by this fresh check. "Give my love to the dear young lady," he said, with his customary impudence; "and tell her we are one degree nearer to finding the thief."

Moody looked at him, doubting whether he was in jest or in earnest.

"Must I squeeze a little more information into that thick head of yours?" asked Sharon. With this question he produced a weekly newspaper, and pointed to a paragraph which reported, among the items of sporting news, Hardyman's recent visit to a sale of horses at a town in the north of France. "We know he didn't pay the bank-note in to his account," Sharon remarked. "What else did he do with it? Took it to pay for the horses that he bought in France! Do you see your way a little plainer now? Very good. Let's try next if the money holds out. Somebody must cross the Channel in search of the note. Which of us two is to sit in the steam-boat with a white basin on his lap? Old Sharon, of course!" He stopped to count the money still left, out of the sum deposited by Moody to defray the cost of the inquiry. "All right!" he went on. "I've got enough to pay my expenses there and back. Don't stir out of London till you hear from me. I can't tell how soon I may not want you. If there's any difficulty in tracing the note, your hand will have to go into your pocket again. Can't you get the lawyer

to join you? Lord! how I should enjoy squandering *his* money! It's a downright disgrace to me to have only got one guinea out of him. I could tear my flesh off my bones when I think of it."

The same night old Sharon started for France, by way of Dover and Calais.

Two days elapsed, and brought no news from Moody's agent. On the third day, he received some information relating to Sharon—not from the man himself, but in a letter from Isabel Miller.

"For once, dear Robert," she wrote, "my judgment has turned out to be sounder than yours. That hateful old man has confirmed my worst opinion of him. Pray have him punished. Take him before a magistrate and charge him with cheating you out of your money. I inclose the sealed letter which he gave me at the farm-house. The week's time before I was to open it expired yesterday. Was there ever anything so impudent and so inhuman? I am too vexed and angry about the money you have wasted on this old wretch to write more. Yours, gratefully and affectionately, Isabel."

The letter in which old Sharon had undertaken (by way of pacifying Isabel) to write the name of the thief, contained these lines:—

"You are a charming girl, my dear; but you still want one thing to make you perfect—and that is a lesson in patience. I am proud and happy to teach you. The name of the thief remains, for the present, Mr. —— (Blank)."

From Moody's point of view, there was but one thing to be said of this: it was just like old Sharon! Isabel's letter was of infinitely greater interest to him.

He feasted his eyes on the words above the signature: she signed herself, "Yours gratefully and affectionately." Did the last word mean that she was really beginning to be fond of him? After kissing the word, he wrote a comforting letter to her, in which he pledged himself to keep a watchful eye on Sharon, and to trust him with no more money until he had honestly earned it first.

A week passed. Moody (longing to see Isabel) still waited in vain for news from France. He had just decided to delay his visit to South Morden no longer, when the errand-boy employed by Sharon brought him this message:—"The old 'un 's at home, and waitin' to see yer."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SHARON'S news was not of an encouraging character. He had met with serious difficulties, and had spent the last farthing of Moody's money in attempting to overcome them.

One discovery of importance he had certainly made. A horse withdrawn from the sale was the only horse that had met with Hardyman's approval. He had secured the animal at the high reserved price of twelve thousand francs—being four hundred and eighty pounds in English money; and he had paid with an English bank-note. The seller (a French horse-dealer resident in Brussels) had returned to Belgium immediately on completing the negotiation. Sharon had ascertained his address, and had written to him at Brussels, inclosing the number of the lost bank-note. In two days he

had received an answer, informing him that the horse-dealer had been called to England by the illness of a relative, and that he had hitherto failed to send any address to which his letters could be forwarded. Hearing this, and having exhausted his funds, Sharon had returned to London. It now rested with Moody to decide whether the course of the inquiry should follow the horse-dealer next. There was the cash account, showing how the money had been spent. And there was Sharon, with his pipe in his mouth and his dog on his lap, waiting for orders.

Moody wisely took time to consider before he committed himself to a decision. In the meanwhile, he ventured to recommend a new course of proceeding which Sharon's report had suggested to his mind.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we have taken the round-about way of getting to our end in view, when the straight road lay before us. If Mr. Hardyman has passed the stolen note, you know, as well as I do, that he has passed it innocently. Instead of wasting time and money in trying to trace a stranger, why not tell Mr. Hardyman what has happened, and ask him to give us the number of the note? You can't think of everything, I know; but it does seem strange that this idea didn't occur to you before you went to France."

"Mr. Moody," said old Sharon, "I shall have to cut your acquaintance. You are a man without faith; I don't like you. As if I hadn't thought of Hardyman weeks since!" he exclaimed, contemptuously. "Are you really soft enough to suppose that a gentleman in his position would talk about his money affairs to me? You know mighty little of him if you do. A fortnight

since I sent one of my men (most respectably dressed) to hang about his farm, and see what information he could pick up. My man became painfully acquainted with the toe of a boot. It was thick, Sir; and it was Hardyman's."

"I will run the risk of the boot," Moody replied, in his quiet way.

"And put the question to Hardyman?"

"Yes."

"Very good," said Sharon. "If you get your answer from his tongue, instead of his boot, the case is at an end—unless I have made a complete mess of it. Look here, Moody! If you want to do me a good turn, tell the lawyer that the guinea-opinion was the right one. Let him know that *he* was the fool, not you, when he buttoned up his pockets and refused to trust me. And, I say!" pursued old Sharon, relapsing into his customary impudence, "you're in love, you know, with that nice girl. I like her myself. When you marry her, invite me to the wedding. I'll make a sacrifice: I'll brush my hair and wash my face in honour of the occasion."

Returning to his lodgings, Moody found two letters waiting on the table. One of them bore the South Morden postmark. He opened that letter first.

It was written by Miss Pink. The first lines contained an urgent entreaty to keep the circumstances connected with the loss of the five hundred pounds the strictest secret from everyone in general, and from Hardyman in particular. The reasons assigned for making the strange request were next expressed in these terms:—"My niece Isabel is, I am happy to inform you, engaged to be married to Mr. Hardyman.

If the slightest hint reached him of her having been associated, no matter how cruelly and unjustly, with a suspicion of theft, the marriage would be broken off, and the result to herself and to everybody connected with her, would be disgrace for the rest of our lives."

On the blank space at the foot of the page a few words were added, in Isabel's writing:—"Whatever changes there may be in my life, your place in my heart is one that no other person can fill: it is the place of my dearest friend. Pray write and tell me that you are not distressed and not angry. My one anxiety is that you should remember what I have always told you about the state of my own feelings. My one wish is that you will still let me love you and value you, as I might have loved and valued a brother."

The letter dropped from Moody's hand. Not a word—not even a sigh—passed his lips. In tearless silence he submitted to the pang that wrung him. In tearless silence he contemplated the wreck of his life.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE narrative returns to South Morden, and follows the events which attended Isabel's marriage engagement.

To say that Miss Pink, inflated by triumph, rose, morally speaking, from the earth and floated among the clouds, is to indicate faintly the effect produced on the ex-schoolmistress when her niece first informed

her of what had happened at the farm. Attacked on one side by her aunt, and on the other by Hardyman, and feebly defended, at the best, by her own doubts and misgivings, Isabel ended in surrendering at discretion. Like thousands of other women in a similar position, she was in the last degree uncertain as to the state of her own heart. To what extent she was insensibly influenced by Hardyman's commanding position in believing herself to be sincerely attached to him, it was beyond her power of self-examination to discover. He doubly dazzled her by his birth and by his celebrity. Not in England only, but throughout Europe, he was a recognised authority on his own subject. How could she—how could any woman—resist the influence of his steady mind, his firmness of purpose, his manly resolution to owe everything to himself and nothing to his rank, set off as these attractive qualities were by the outward and personal advantages which exercise an ascendancy of their own? Isabel was fascinated, and yet Isabel was not at ease. In her lonely moments she was troubled by regretful thoughts of Moody, which perplexed and irritated her. She had always behaved honestly to him; she had never encouraged him to hope that his love for her had the faintest prospect of being returned. Yet, knowing as she did, that her conduct was blameless so far, there were nevertheless perverse sympathies in her which took his part. In the wakeful hours of the night there were whispering voices in her which said, Think of Moody! Had there been a growing kindness towards this good friend in her heart, of which she was herself not aware? She tried to detect it—to weigh it for what it was really worth. But it

lay too deep to be discovered and estimated, if it did really exist—if it had any sounder origin than her own morbid fancy. In the broad light of day, in the little bustling duties of life, she forgot it again. She could think of what she ought to wear on the wedding day; she could even try privately how her new signature, "Isabel Hardyman," would look when she had the right to use it. On the whole, it may be said that the time passed smoothly—with some occasional checks and drawbacks, which were the more easily endured seeing that they took their rise in Isabel's own conduct. Compliant as she was in general, there were two instances, among others, in which her resolution to take her own way was not to be overcome. She refused to write either to Moody or to Lady Lydiard informing them of her engagement; and she steadily disapproved of Miss Pink's policy of concealment, in the matter of the robbery at Lady Lydiard's house. Her aunt could only secure her as a passive accomplice by stating family considerations in the strongest possible terms. "If the disgrace was confined to you, my dear, I might leave you to decide. But I am involved in it, as your nearest relative; and, what is more, even the sacred memories of your father and mother might feel the slur cast on them." This exaggerated language—like all exaggerated language, a mischievous weapon in the arsenal of weakness and prejudice—had its effect on Isabel. Reluctantly and sadly, she consented to be silent.

Miss Pink wrote word of the engagement to Moody first; reserving to a later day the superior pleasure of informing Lady Lydiard of the very event which that audacious woman had declared to be impossible. To

her aunt's surprise, just as she was about to close the envelope Isabel stepped forward, and inconsistently requested leave to add a postscript to the very letter which she had refused to write! Miss Pink was not even permitted to see the postscript. Isabel secured the envelope the moment she laid down her pen, and retired to her room with a headache (which was heartache in disguise) for the rest of the day.

While the question of the marriage was still in debate, an event occurred which exercised a serious influence on Hardyman's future plans.

He received a letter from the Continent which claimed his immediate attention. One of the sovereigns of Europe had decided on making some radical changes in the mounting and equipment of a cavalry regiment; and he required the assistance of Hardyman in that important part of the contemplated reform which was connected with the choice and purchase of horses. Setting his own interests out of the question, Hardyman owed obligations to the kindness of his illustrious correspondent which made it impossible for him to send an excuse. In a fortnight's time, at the latest, it would be necessary for him to leave England; and a month or more might elapse before it would be possible for him to return.

Under these circumstances, he proposed, in his own precipitate way, to hasten the date of the marriage. The necessary legal delay would permit the ceremony to be performed on that day fortnight. Isabel might then accompany him on his journey, and spend a brilliant honeymoon at the foreign Court. She at once refused, not only to accept this proposal, but even to take it into consideration. While Miss Pink

dwelt eloquently on the shortness of the notice, Miss Pink's niece based her resolution on far more important grounds. Hardyman had not yet announced the contemplated marriage to his parents and friends; and Isabel was determined not to become his wife, until she could be first assured of a courteous and tolerant reception by the family—if she could hope for no warmer welcome at their hands.

Hardyman was not a man who yielded easily, even in trifles. In the present case, his dearest interests were concerned in inducing Isabel to reconsider her decision. He was still vainly trying to shake her resolution when the afternoon post brought a letter for Miss Pink, which introduced a new element of disturbance into the discussion. The letter was nothing less than Lady Lydiard's reply to the written announcement of Isabel's engagement, dispatched on the previous day by Miss Pink.

Her Ladyship's answer was a surprisingly short one. It only contained these lines:—

"Lady Lydiard begs to acknowledge the receipt of Miss Pink's letter, requesting that she will say nothing to Mr. Hardyman of the loss of a bank-note in her house, and assigning as a reason that Miss Isabel Miller is engaged to be married to Mr. Hardyman, and might be prejudiced in his estimation if the facts were made known. Miss Pink may make her mind easy. Lady Lydiard has not the slightest intention of taking Mr. Hardyman into her confidence on the subject of her domestic affairs. With regard to the proposed marriage, Lady Lydiard casts no doubt on Miss Pink's perfect sincerity and good faith; but, at the same time, she positively declines to believe that Mr. Hardyman

means to make Miss Isabel Miller his wife. Lady L. will yield to the evidence of a properly attested certificate—and to nothing else."

A folded piece of paper, directed to Isabel, dropped out of this characteristic letter as Miss Pink turned from the first page to the second. Lady Lydiard addressed her adopted daughter in these words:—

"I was on the point of leaving home to visit you again, when I received your aunt's letter. My poor deluded child, no words can tell how distressed I am about you. You are already sacrificed to the folly of the most foolish woman living. For God's sake, take care you do not fall a victim next to the designs of a profligate man. Come to me instantly, Isabel, and I promise to take care of you."

Fortified by these letters, and aided by Miss Pink's indignation, Hardyman pressed his proposal on Isabel with renewed resolution. She made no attempt to combat his arguments—she only held firmly by her decision. Without some encouragement from Hardyman's father and mother, she still steadily refused to become his wife. Irritated already by Lady Lydiard's letters, he lost the self-command which so eminently distinguished him in the ordinary affairs of life, and showed the domineering and despotic temper which was an inbred part of his disposition. Isabel's high spirit at once resented the harsh terms in which he spoke to her. In the plainest words, she released him from his engagement, and, without waiting for his excuses, quitted the room.

Left together, Hardyman and Miss Pink devised an arrangement which paid due respect to Isabel's scruples, and at the same time met Lady Lydiard's insulting

assertion of disbelief in Hardyman's honour, by a formal and public announcement of the marriage.

It was proposed to give a garden party at the farm in a week's time, for the express purpose of introducing Isabel to Hardyman's family and friends in the character of his betrothed wife. If his father and mother accepted the invitation, Isabel's only objection to hastening their union would fall to the ground. Hardyman might, in that case, plead with his Imperial correspondent for a delay in his departure of a few days more; and the marriage might still take place before he left England. Isabel, at Miss Pink's intercession, was induced to accept her lover's excuses, and, in the event of her favourable reception by Hardyman's parents at the farm, to give her consent (not very willingly even yet) to hastening the ceremony which was to make her Hardyman's wife.

On the next morning the whole of the invitations were sent out, excepting the invitation to Hardyman's father and mother. Without mentioning it to Isabel, Hardyman decided on personally appealing to his mother before he ventured on taking the head of the family into his confidence.

The result of the interview was partially successful —and no more. Lord Rotherfield declined to see his youngest son; and he had engagements which would, under any circumstances, prevent his being present at the garden party. But, at the express request of Lady Rotherfield, he was willing to make certain concessions.

"I have always regarded Alfred as a barely sane person," said his Lordship, "since he turned his back on his prospects to become a horse-dealer. If we de-

cline altogether to sanction this new act—I won't say, of insanity, I will say, of absurdity—on his part, it is impossible to predict to what discreditable extremities he may not proceed. We must temporise with Alfred. In the meantime I shall endeavour to obtain some information respecting this young person—named Miller, I think you said, and now resident at South Morden. If I am satisfied that she is a woman of reputable character, possessing an average education, and presentable manners, we may as well let Alfred take his own way. He is out of the pale of Society, as it is; and Miss Miller has no father and mother to complicate matters, which is distinctly a merit on her part —and in short, if the marriage is not absolutely disgraceful, the wisest way (as we have no power to prevent it) will be to submit. You will say nothing to Alfred about what I propose to do. I tell you plainly I don't trust him. You will simply inform him from me that I want time to consider, and that, unless he hears to the contrary in the interval, he may expect to have the sanction of your presence at his breakfast, or luncheon, or whatever it is. I must go to town in a day or two, and I shall ascertain what Alfred's friends know about this last of his many follies, if I meet any of them at the club."

Returning to South Morden in no serene frame of mind, Hardyman found Isabel in a state of depression which perplexed and alarmed him.

The news that his mother might be expected to be present at the garden party failed entirely to raise her spirits. The only explanation she gave of the change in her was, that the dull heavy weather of the last few days made her feel a little languid and nervous. Na-

turally dissatisfied with this reply to his inquiries, Hardyman asked for Miss Pink. He was informed that Miss Pink could not see him. She was constitutionally subject to asthma, and, having warnings of a return of the malady, she was (by the doctor's advice) keeping her room. Hardyman returned to the farm in a temper which was felt by everybody in his employment, from the trainer to the stable-boys.

While the apology made for Miss Pink stated no more than the plain truth, it must be confessed that Hardyman was right in declining to be satisfied with Isabel's excuse for the melancholy that oppressed her. She had that morning received Moody's answer to the lines which she had addressed to him at the end of her aunt's letter; and she had not yet recovered from the effect which it had produced on her spirits.

"It is impossible for me to say honestly that I am not distressed (Moody wrote) by the news of your marriage engagement. The blow has fallen very heavily on me. When I look at the future now, I see only a dreary blank. This is not your fault—you are in no way to blame. I remember the time when I should have been too angry to own this—when I might have said or done things which I should have bitterly repented afterwards. That time is past. My temper has been softened, since I have befriended you in your troubles. That good at least has come out of my foolish hopes, and perhaps also out of the true sympathy which I have felt for you. I can honestly ask you to accept my heart's dearest wishes for your happiness—and I can keep the rest to myself.

"Let me say a word now relating to the efforts that

I have made to help you, since that sad day when you left Lady Lydiard's house.

"I had hoped (for reasons which it is needless to mention here) to interest Mr. Hardyman himself in aiding our inquiry. But your aunt's wishes, as expressed in her letter to me, close my lips. I will only ask you, at some convenient time, to let me mention the last discoveries that we have made; leaving it to your discretion, when Mr. Hardyman has become your husband, to ask him the questions which, under other circumstances, I should have put to him myself.

"It is, of course, possible that the view I take of Mr. Hardyman's capacity to help us may be a mistaken one. In this case, if you still wish the investigation to be privately carried on, I beg of you to let me continue to direct it, as the greatest favour you can confer on your devoted old friend.

"You need be under no apprehension about the expense to which you are likely to put me. I have unexpectedly inherited what is to me a handsome fortune.

"The same post which brought your aunt's letter brought a line from a lawyer asking me to see him on the subject of my late father's affairs. I waited a day or two before I could summon heart enough to see him, or to see anybody; and then I went to his office. You have heard that my father's bank stopped payment, at a time of commercial panic. His failure was mainly attributable to the treachery of a friend to whom he had lent a large sum of money, and who paid him the yearly interest, without acknowledging that every farthing of it had been lost in unsuccessful speculations. The son of this man has prospered in

business, and he has honourably devoted a part of his wealth to the payment of his father's creditors. Half the sum due to *my* father has thus passed into my hands as his next of kin; and the other half is to follow in course of time. If my hopes had been fulfilled, how gladly I should have shared my prosperity with you! As it is, I have far more than enough for my wants as a lonely man, and plenty left to spend in your service.

"God bless and prosper you, my dear. I shall ask you to accept a little present from me, among the other offerings that are made to you before the wedding day.—R. M."

The studiously considerate and delicate tone in which these lines were written had an effect on Isabel which was exactly the opposite of the effect intended by the writer. She burst into a passionate fit of tears; and in the safe solitude of her own room, the despairing words escaped her, "I wish I had died before I met with Alfred Hardyman!"

As the days wore on, disappointments and difficulties seemed by a kind of fatality to beset the contemplated announcement of the marriage.

Miss Pink's asthma, developed by the unfavourable weather, set the doctor's art at defiance, and threatened to keep that unfortunate lady a prisoner in her room on the day of the party. Hardyman's invitations were in some cases refused; and in others accepted by husbands, with excuses for the absence of their wives. His elder brother made an apology for himself as well as for his wife. Felix Sweetsir wrote, "With pleasure, dear Alfred, if my health permits me to leave the

house." Lady Lydiard, invited at Miss Pink's special request, sent no reply. The one encouraging circumstance was the silence of Lady Rotherfield. So long as her son received no intimation to the contrary, it was a sign that Lord Rotherfield permitted his wife to sanction the marriage by her presence.

Hardyman wrote to his Imperial correspondent, engaging to leave England on the earliest possible day, and asking to be pardoned if he failed to express himself more definitely, in consideration of domestic affairs which it was necessary to settle before he started for the Continent. If there should not be time enough to write again, he promised to send a telegraphic announcement of his departure. Long afterwards, Hardyman remembered the misgivings that had troubled him when he wrote that letter. In the rough draught of it, he had mentioned, as his excuse for not being yet certain of his own movements, that he expected to be immediately married. In the fair copy, the vague foreboding of some accident to come was so painfully present to his mind, that he struck out the words which referred to his marriage and substituted the designedly indefinite phrase, "domestic affairs."

CHAPTER XX.

THE day of the garden party arrived. There was no rain; but the air was heavy, and the sky was overcast by lowering clouds.

Some hours before the guests were expected, Isabel arrived alone at the farm, bearing the apologies of unfortunate Miss Pink, still kept a prisoner in her bed-

chamber by the asthma. In the confusion produced at the cottage by the preparations for entertaining the company, the one room in which Hardyman could receive Isabel with the certainty of not being interrupted was the smoking-room. To this haven of refuge he led her—still reserved and silent, still not restored to her customary spirits. "If any visitors come before the time," Hardyman said to his servant, "tell them I am engaged at the stables. I must have an hour's quiet talk with you," he continued, turning to Isabel, "or I shall be in too bad a temper to receive my guests with common politeness. The worry of giving this party is not to be told in words. I almost wish I had been content with presenting you to my mother, and had let the rest of my acquaintance go to the devil."

A quiet half hour passed; and the first visitor, a stranger to the servants, appeared at the cottage-gate. He was a middle-aged man, and he had no wish to disturb Mr. Hardyman. "I will wait in the grounds," he said, "and trouble nobody." The middle-aged man, who expressed himself in these modest terms, was Robert Moody.

Five minutes later, a carriage drove up to the gate. An elderly lady got out of it, followed by a fat white Scotch terrier, who growled at every stranger within his reach. It is needless to introduce Lady Lydiard and Tommie.

Informed that Mr. Hardyman was at the stables, Lady Lydiard gave the servant her card. "Take that to your master, and say I won't detain him five minutes." With these words, her Ladyship sauntered into the grounds. She looked about her with observant eyes; not only noticing the tent which had been set

up on the grass to accommodate the expected guests, but entering it, and looking at the waiters who were engaged in placing the luncheon on the table. Returning to the outer world, she next remarked that Mr. Hardyman's lawn was in very bad order. Barren sun-dried patches, and little holes and crevices opened here and there by the action of the summer heat, announced that the lawn, like everything else at the farm, had been neglected in the exclusive attention paid to the claims of the horses. Reaching a shrubbery which bounded one side of the grounds next, her Ladyship became aware of a man slowly approaching her, to all appearance absorbed in thought. The man drew a little nearer. She lifted her glasses to her eyes, and recognised—Moody.

No embarrassment was produced on either side by this unexpected meeting. Lady Lydiard had, not long since, sent to ask her former steward to visit her; regretting, in her warm-hearted way, the terms on which they had separated, and wishing to atone for the harsh language that had escaped her at their parting interview. In the friendly talk which followed the reconciliation, Lady Lydiard not only heard the news of Moody's pecuniary inheritance—but, noticing the change in his appearance for the worse, contrived to extract from him the confession of his ill-starred passion for Isabel. To discover him now, after all that he had acknowledged, walking about the grounds at Hardyman's farm, took her Ladyship completely by surprise. "Good Heavens!" she exclaimed, in her loudest tones, "what are *you* doing here?"

"You mentioned Mr. Hardyman's garden party, my Lady, when I had the honour of waiting on you,"

Moody answered. "Thinking over it afterwards, it seemed the fittest occasion I could find for making a little wedding present to Miss Isabel. Is there any harm in my asking Mr. Hardyman to let me put the present on her plate, so that she may see it when she sits down to luncheon? If your Ladyship thinks so, I will go away directly, and send the gift by post."

Lady Lydiard looked at him attentively. "You don't despise the girl," she asked, "for selling herself for rank and money? I do—I can tell you!"

Moody's worn white face flushed a little. "No, my Lady," he answered, "I can't hear you say that! Isabel would not have engaged herself to Mr. Hardyman unless she had been fond of him—as fond, I dare say, as I once hoped she might be of me. It's a hard thing to confess that; but I do confess it, in justice to her—God bless her!"

The generosity that spoke in those simple words touched the finest sympathies in Lady Lydiard's nature. "Give me your hand," she said, with her own generous spirit kindling in her eyes. "You have a great heart, Moody. Isabel Miller is a fool for not marrying *you* —and one day she will know it!"

Before a word more could pass between them, Hardyman's voice was audible on the other side of the shrubbery, calling irritably to his servant to find Lady Lydiard.

Moody retired to the farther end of the walk, while Lady Lydiard advanced in the opposite direction, so as to meet Hardyman at the entrance to the shrubbery. He bowed stiffly, and begged to know why her Ladyship had honoured him with a visit.

Lady Lydiard replied without noticing the coldness of her reception.

"I have not been very well, Mr. Hardyman, or you would have seen me before this. My only object in presenting myself here, is to make my excuses personally for having written of you in terms which expressed a doubt of your honour. I have done you an injustice, and I beg you to forgive me."

Hardyman acknowledged this frank apology as unreservedly as it had been offered to him. "Say no more, Lady Lydiard. And let me hope, now you are here, that you will honour my little party with your presence."

Lady Lydiard gravely stated her reasons for not accepting the invitation.

"I disapprove so strongly of unequal marriages," she said, walking on slowly towards the cottage, "that I cannot, in common consistency, become one of your guests. I shall always feel interested in Isabel Miller's welfare; and I can honestly say I shall be glad if your married life proves that my old-fashioned prejudices are without justification in your case. Accept my thanks for your invitation; and let me hope that my plain speaking has not offended you."

She bowed, and looked about her for Tommie before she advanced to the carriage waiting for her at the gate. In the surprise of seeing Moody she had forgotten to look back for the dog when she entered the shrubbery. She now called to him, and blew the whistle at her watch-chain. Not a sign of Tommie was to be seen. Hardyman instantly directed the servants to search in the cottage and out of the cottage for the dog. The order was obeyed with all needful activity

and intelligence, and entirely without success. For the time being, at any rate, Tommie was lost.

Hardyman promised to have the dog looked for in every part of the farm, and to send him back in the care of one of his own men. With these polite assurances Lady Lydiard was obliged to be satisfied. She drove away in a very despondent frame of mind. "First Isabel, and now Tommie," thought her Ladyship. "I am losing the only companions who made life tolerable to me."

Returning from the garden gate, after taking leave of his visitor, Hardyman received from his servant a handful of letters which had just arrived for him. Walking slowly over the lawn as he opened them, he found nothing but excuses for the absence of guests who had already accepted their invitations. He had just thrust the letters into his pocket, when he heard footsteps behind him, and, looking round, found himself confronted by Moody.

"Hullo! have you come here to lunch?" Hardyman asked, roughly.

"I have come here, Sir, with a little gift for Miss Isabel, in honour of her marriage," Moody answered quietly. "And I ask your permission to put it on the table, so that she may see it when your guests sit down to luncheon."

He opened a jeweller's case as he spoke, containing a plain gold bracelet with an inscription engraved on the inner side—"To Miss Isabel Miller, with the sincere good wishes of Robert Moody."

Plain as it was, the design of the bracelet was unusually beautiful. Hardyman had noticed Moody's agitation on the day when he had met Isabel near

her aunt's house, and had drawn his own conclusions from it. His face darkened with a momentary jealousy as he looked at the bracelet. "All right, old fellow!" he said, with contemptuous familiarity. "Don't be modest! Wait and give it to her with your own hand."

"No, Sir," said Moody. "I would rather leave it, if you please, to speak for itself."

Hardyman understood the delicacy of feeling which dictated those words, and, without well knowing why, resented it. He was on the point of speaking, under the influence of this unworthy feeling, when Isabel's voice reached his ears, calling to him from the cottage.

Moody's face contracted with a sudden expression of pain as he too recognised the voice. "Don't let me detain you, Sir," he said, sadly. "Good morning!"

Hardyman left him without ceremony. Moody, slowly following, entered the tent. All the preparations for the luncheon had been completed; nobody was there. The places to be occupied by the guests were indicated by cards bearing their names. Moody found Isabel's card, and put his bracelet inside the folded napkin on her plate. For a while he stood with his hand on the table, thinking. The temptation to communicate once more with Isabel before he lost her for ever, was fast getting the better of his powers of resistance. "If I could persuade her to write a word to say she liked her bracelet," he thought, "it would be a comfort when I go back to my solitary life." He tore a leaf out of his pocket-book and wrote on it, "One line to say you accept my gift and my good wishes. Put it under the cushion of your chair,

and I shall find it when the company have left the tent." He slipped the paper into the case which held the bracelet, and instead of leaving the farm as he had intended, turned back to the shelter of the shrubbery.

CHAPTER XXI.

HARDYMAN went on to the cottage. He found Isabel in some agitation. And there, by her side, with his tail wagging slowly, and his eye on Hardyman in expectation of a possible kick—there was the lost Tommie!

"Has Lady Lydiard gone?" Isabel asked, eagerly.

"Yes," said Hardyman. "Where did you find the dog?"

As events had ordered it, the dog had found Isabel—under these circumstances.

The appearance of Lady Lydiard's card in the smoking room had been an alarming event for Lady Lydiard's adopted daughter. She was guiltily conscious of not having answered her Ladyship's note, inclosed in Miss Pink's letter, and of not having taken her Ladyship's advice in resisting the advances of Hardyman. As he rose to leave the room and receive his visitor in the grounds, Isabel intreated him to say nothing of her presence at the farm, unless Lady Lydiard exhibited a forgiving turn of mind by asking to see her. Left by herself in the smoking-room, she suddenly heard a bark in the passage which had a familiar sound in her ears. She opened the door—and in rushed Tommie, with one of his shrieks

of delight! Curiosity had taken him into the house. He had heard the voices in the smoking-room; had recognised Isabel's voice; and had waited, with his customary cunning and his customary distrust of strangers, until Hardyman was out of the way. Isabel kissed and caressed him, and then drove him out again to the lawn, fearing that Lady Lydiard might return to look for him. Going back to the smoking-room, she stood at the window watching for Hardyman's return. When the servants came in to look for the dog, she could only tell them that she had last seen him in the grounds, not far from the cottage. The useless search being abandoned, and the carriage having left the gate, who should crawl out from the back of a cupboard in which some empty hampers were placed but Tommie himself! How he had contrived to get back to the smoking-room (unless she had omitted to completely close the door on her return) it was impossible to say. But there he was, determined this time to stay with Isabel, and keeping in his hiding-place until he heard the movement of the carriage-wheels, which informed him that his lawful mistress had left the cottage! Isabel had at once called to Hardyman, on the chance that the carriage might yet be stopped. It was already out of sight, and nobody knew which of two roads it had taken, both leading to London. In this emergency, Isabel could only look at Hardyman and ask what was to be done.

"I can't spare a servant till after the party," he answered. "The dog must be tied up at the stables."

Isabel shook her head. Tommie was not accustomed to be tied up. He would make a disturb-

ance, and he would be beaten by the grooms. "I will take care of him," she said. "He won't leave me."

"There's something else to think of besides the dog," Hardyman rejoined, irritably. "Look at these letters!" He pulled them out of his pocket as he spoke. "Here are no less than seven men, all calling themselves my friends, who accepted my invitation, and who write to excuse themselves on the very day of the party! Do you know why? They're all afraid of my father — I forgot to tell you he's a Cabinet Minister as well as a Lord. Cowards and cads! They have heard he isn't coming, and they think to curry favour with the great man by stopping away. Come along, Isabel! Let's take their names off the luncheon-table. Not a man of them shall ever darken my doors again!"

"I am to blame for what has happened," Isabel answered, sadly. "I am estranging you from your friends. There is still time, Alfred, to alter your mind and let me go."

He put his arm round her with rough fondness. "I would sacrifice every friend I have in the world rather than lose you. Come along!"

They left the cottage. At the entrance to the tent Hardyman noticed the dog at Isabel's heels, and vented his ill-temper, as usual with male humanity, on the nearest unoffending creature that he could find. "Be off, you mongrel brute!" he shouted. The tail of Tommie relaxed from its customary tight curve over the small of his back; and the legs of Tommie (with his tail between them) took him at full gallop to the friendly shelter of the cupboard in the smoking-room. It was one of those trifling circumstances which women

notice seriously. Isabel said nothing; she only thought to herself, "I wish he had shown his temper when I first knew him!"

They entered the tent.

"I'll read the names," said Hardyman, "and you find the cards and tear them up. Stop! I'll keep the cards. You're just the sort of woman my father likes. He'll be reconciled to me when he sees you, after we are married. If one of those men ever asks him for a place, I'll take care, if it's years hence, to put an obstacle in his way! Here, take my pencil, and make a mark on the cards to remind me;—the same mark I set against a horse in my book when I don't like him—a cross, inclosed in a circle." He produced his pocket-book. His hands trembled with anger as he gave the pencil to Isabel and laid the book on the table. He had just read the name of the first false friend, and Isabel had just found the card, when a servant appeared with a message. "Mrs. Drumblade has arrived, Sir, and wishes to see you on a matter of the greatest importance."

Hardyman left the tent, not very willingly. "Wait here," he said to Isabel; "I'll be back directly."

She was standing near her own place at the table. Moody had left one end of the jeweller's case visible above the napkin, to attract her attention. In a minute more the bracelet and the note were in her hands. She dropped on her chair, overwhelmed by the conflicting emotions that rose in her at the sight of the bracelet, at the reading of the note. Her head drooped, and the tears filled her eyes. "Are all women as blind as I have been to what is good and noble in the men who love them?" she wondered,

sadly. "Better as it is," she thought, with a bitter sigh; "I am not worthy of him."

As she took up the pencil to write her answer to Moody on the back of her dinner-card, the servant appeared again at the door of the tent.

"My master wants you at the cottage, Miss, immediately."

Isabel rose, putting the bracelet and the note in the silver-mounted leather pocket (a present from Hardyman) which hung at her belt. In the hurry of passing round the table to get out, she never noticed that her dress touched Hardyman's pocket-book, placed close to the edge, and threw it down on the grass below. The book fell into one of the heat-cracks which Lady Lydiard had noticed as evidence of the neglected condition of the cottage lawn.

"You ought to hear the pleasant news my sister has just brought me," said Hardyman, when Isabel joined him in the parlour. "Mrs. Drumblade has been told, on the best authority, that my mother is not coming to the party."

"There must be some reason, of course, dear Isabel," added Mrs. Drumblade. "Have you any idea of what it can be? I haven't seen my mother myself; and all my inquiries have failed to find it out."

She looked searchingly at Isabel as she spoke. The mask of sympathy on her face was admirably worn. Nobody who possessed only a superficial acquaintance with Mrs. Drumblade's character, would have suspected how thoroughly she was enjoying in secret the position of embarrassment in which her news had placed her brother. Instinctively doubting whether Mrs. Drumblade's friendly behaviour was quite so sincere as it

appeared to be, Isabel answered that she was a stranger to Lady Rotherfield, and was therefore quite at a loss to explain the cause of her Ladyship's absence. As she spoke, the guests began to arrive in quick succession, and the subject was dropped, as a matter of course.

It was not a merry party. Hardyman's approaching marriage had been made the topic of much malicious gossip; and Isabel's character had, as usual in such cases, become the object of all the false reports that scandal could invent. Lady Rotherfield's absence confirmed the general conviction that Hardyman was disgracing himself. The men were all more or less uneasy. The women resented the discovery that Isabel was, personally speaking at least, beyond the reach of hostile criticism. Her beauty was viewed as a downright offence; her refined and modest manners were set down as perfect acting; "really disgusting, my dear, in so young a girl." General Drumblade, a large and mouldy veteran, in a state of chronic astonishment (after his own matrimonial experience) at Hardyman's folly in marrying at all, diffused a wide circle of gloom, wherever he went and whatever he did. His accomplished wife, forcing her high spirits on everybody's attention with a sort of kittenish playfulness, intensified the depressing effect of the general dullness by all the force of the strongest contrast. After waiting half an hour for his mother, and waiting in vain, Hardyman led the way to the tent in despair. "The sooner I fill their stomachs and get rid of them," he thought savagely, "the better I shall be pleased!"

The luncheon was attacked by the company with a certain silent ferocity, which the waiters noticed as

remarkable, even in their large experience. The men drank deeply, but with wonderfully little effect in raising their spirits; the women, with the exception of amiable Mrs. Drumblade, kept Isabel deliberately out of the conversation that went on among them. General Drumblade, sitting next to her in one of the places of honour, discoursed to Isabel privately on "my brother-in-law Hardyman's infernal temper." A young Marquis, on her other side—a mere lad, chosen to make the necessary speech in acknowledgment of his superior rank—rose, in a state of nervous trepidation, to propose Isabel's health as the chosen bride of their host. Pale and trembling, conscious of having forgotten the words which he had learnt beforehand this unhappy young nobleman began, "Ladies and gentlemen, I haven't an idea——" He stopped, put his hand to his head, stared wildly, and sat down again; having contrived to state his own case with masterly brevity and perfect truth, in a speech of seven words.

While the dismay, in some cases, and the amusement in others, was still at its height, Hardyman's valet made his appearance, and, approaching his master, said in a whisper, "Could I speak to you, Sir, for a moment outside."

"What the devil do you want?" Hardyman asked, irritably. "Is that a letter in your hand? Give it to me."

The valet was a Frenchman. In other words, he had a sense of what was due to himself. His master had forgotten this. He gave up the letter with a certain dignity of manner, and left the tent. Hardyman opened the letter. He turned pale as he read it;

crumpled it in his hand, and threw it down on the table. "By G—d! it's a lie!" he exclaimed, furiously.

The guests rose in confusion. Mrs. Drumblade, finding the letter within her reach, coolly possessed herself of it; recognised her mother's handwriting; and read these lines:—

"I have only now succeeded in persuading your father to let me write to you. For God's sake, break off your marriage, at any sacrifice. Your father has heard, on unanswerable authority, that Miss Isabel Miller left her situation in Lady Lydiard's house on suspicion of theft."

While his sister was reading this letter, Hardyman had made his way to Isabel's chair. "I must speak to you, directly," he whispered. "Come away with me!" He turned, as he took her arm, and looked at the table. "Where is my letter?" he asked. Mrs. Drumblade handed it to him, dexterously crumpled up again as she had found it. "No bad news, dear Alfred, I hope?" she said, in her most affectionate manner. Hardyman snatched the letter from her, without answering, and led Isabel out of the tent.

"Read that!" he said, when they were alone. "And tell me at once whether it's true or false."

Isabel read the letter. For a moment the shock of the discovery held her speechless. She recovered herself, and returned the letter.

"It is true," she answered.

Hardyman staggered back as if she had shot him.

"True that you are guilty?" he asked.

"No; I am innocent. Everybody who knows me believes in my innocence. It is true that the appearances were against me. They are against me still."

Having said this, she waited, quietly and firmly, for his next words.

He passed his hand over his forehead with a sigh of relief. "It's bad enough as it is," he said, speaking quietly on his side. "But the remedy for it is plain enough. Come back to the tent."

She never moved. "Why?" she asked.

"Do you suppose I don't believe in your innocence, too?" he answered. "The one way of setting you right with the world now, is for me to make you my wife, in spite of the appearances that point to you. I'm too fond of you, Isabel, to give you up. Come back with me, and I will announce our marriage to my friends."

She took his hand, and kissed it. "It is generous and good of you," she said; "but it must not be."

He took a step nearer to her. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"It was against my will," she pursued, "that my aunt concealed the truth from you. I did wrong to consent to it; I will do wrong no more. Your mother is right, Alfred. After what has happened, I am not fit to be your wife until my innocence is proved. It is not proved yet."

The angry colour began to rise in his face once more. "Take care," he said; "I am not in a humour to be trifled with."

"I am not trifling with you," she answered in low sad tones.

"You really mean what you say?"

"I mean it."

"Don't be obstinate, Isabel. Take time to consider."

"You are very kind, Alfred. My duty is plain to me. I will marry you—if you still wish it—when my good name is restored to me. Not before."

He laid one hand on her arm, and pointed with the other to the guests in the distance, all leaving the tent on the way to their carriages.

"Your good name will be restored to you," he said, "on the day when I make you my wife. The worst enemy you have cannot associate *my* name with a suspicion of theft. Remember that, and think a little before you decide. You see those people there. If you don't change your mind by the time they have got to the cottage, it's good-bye between us, and good-bye for ever. I refuse to wait for you; I refuse to accept a conditional engagement. Wait, and think. They're walking slowly; you have got some minutes more."

He still held her arm, watching the guests as they gradually receded from view. It was not until they had all collected in a group outside the cottage door that he spoke himself, or that he permitted Isabel to speak again.

"Now," he said; "you have had your time to get cool. Will you take my arm, and join those people with me? or, will you say good-bye for ever?"

"Forgive me, Alfred!" she began, gently. "I cannot consent, in justice to you, to shelter myself behind your name. It is the name of your family; and they have a right to expect that you will not degrade it"——

"I want a plain answer," he interposed, sternly. "Which is it? Yes, or No?"

She looked at him with sad compassionate eyes. Her voice was firm as she answered him in the one word that he had desired. The word was—"No!"

Without speaking to her, without even looking at her, he turned and walked back to the cottage.

Making his way silently through the group of visitors—every one of whom had been informed of what had happened by his sister—with his head down and his lips fast closed, he entered the parlour, and rang the bell which communicated with his foreman's rooms at the stables.

"You know that I am going abroad on business?" he said, when the man appeared.

"Yes, Sir."

"I am going to-day—going by the night train to Dover. Order the horse to be put to instantly in the dog-cart. Is there anything wanted before I am off?"

The inexorable necessities of business asserted their claims through the obedient medium of the foreman. Chafing at the delay, Hardyman was obliged to sit at his desk, signing cheques and passing accounts, with the dog-cart waiting in the stable-yard.

A knock at the door startled him in the middle of his work. "Come in!" he called out sharply.

He looked up, expecting to see one of the guests or one of the servants. It was Moody who entered the room. Hardyman laid down his pen, and fixed his eyes sternly on the man who had dared to interrupt him.

"What the devil do *you* want?" he asked.

"I have seen Miss Isabel, and spoken with her," Moody replied. "Mr. Hardyman, I believe it is in your power to set this matter right. For the young lady's sake, Sir, you must not leave England without doing it."

Hardyman turned to his foreman. "Is this fellow mad or drunk?" he asked.

Moody proceeded as calmly and as resolutely as if those words had not been spoken. "I apologise for my intrusion, Sir. I will trouble you with no explanations; I will only ask one question. Have you a memorandum of the number of that five-hundred pound note which you paid away in France?"

Hardyman lost all control over himself.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, "have you been prying into my private affairs? Is it *your* business to know what I did in France?"

"Is it *your* vengeance on a woman to refuse to tell her the number of a bank-note?" Moody rejoined, firmly.

That answer forced its way, through Hardyman's anger, to Hardyman's sense of honour. He rose and advanced to Moody. For a moment the two men faced each other in silence. "You're a bold fellow," said Hardyman, with a sudden change from anger to irony. "I'll do the lady justice. I'll look at my pocket-book."

He put his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat; he searched his other pockets; he turned over the objects on his writing-table. The book was gone.

Moody watched him with a feeling of despair. "Oh! Mr. Hardyman, don't say you have lost your pocket-book!"

He sat down again at his desk, with sullen submission to the new disaster. "All I can say is, you're at liberty to look for it," he replied. "I must have dropped it somewhere." He turned impatiently to the foreman. "Now, then! What is the next cheque

wanted? I shall go mad if I wait in this damned place much longer!"

Moody left him, and found his way to the servants' offices. "Mr. Hardyman has lost his pocket-book," he said. "Look for it, indoors and out—on the lawn and in the tent. Ten pounds reward for the man who finds it!"

Servants and waiters instantly dispersed, eager for the promised reward. The men who pursued the search outside the cottage divided their forces. Some of them examined the lawn and the flower-beds. Others went straight to the empty tent. These last were too completely absorbed in pursuing the object in view to notice that they disturbed a dog, eating a stolen lunch of his own from the morsels left on the plates. The dog slunk away under the canvas when the men came in, waited in hiding until they had gone, then returned to the tent, and went on with his luncheon.

Moody hastened back to the part of the grounds (close to the shrubbery) in which Isabel was waiting his return.

She looked at him, while he was telling her of his interview with Hardyman, with an expression in her eyes which he had never seen in them before—an expression which set his heart beating wildly, and made him break off in his narrative before he had reached the end.

"I understand," she said quietly, as he stopped in confusion. "You have made one more sacrifice to my welfare. Robert! I believe you are the noblest man that ever breathed the breath of life!"

His eyes sank before hers; he blushed like a boy. "I have done nothing for you yet," he said. "Don't

despair of the future if the pocket-book should not be found. I know who the man is who received the bank-note; and I have only to find him to decide the question whether it *is* the stolen note or not."

She smiled sadly at his enthusiasm. "Are you going back to Mr. Sharon to help you?" she asked. "That trick he played me has destroyed *my* belief in him. He no more knows than I do who the thief really is."

"You are mistaken, Isabel. He knows—and I know." He stopped there, and made a sign to her to be silent. One of the servants was approaching them.

"Is the pocket-book found?" Moody asked.

"No, Sir."

"Has Mr. Hardyman left the cottage?"

"He has just gone, Sir. Have you any further instructions to give us?"

"No. There is my address in London, if the pocket-book should be found."

The man took the card that was handed to him and retired. Moody offered his arm to Isabel. "I am at your service," he said, "when you wish to return to your aunt."

They had advanced nearly as far as the tent, on their way out of the grounds, when they were met by a gentleman walking towards them from the cottage. He was a stranger to Isabel. Moody immediately recognised him as Mr. Felix Sweetsir.

"Ha! our good Moody!" cried Felix. "Enviable man! you look younger than ever." He took off his hat to Isabel; his bright restless eyes suddenly became quiet as they rested on her. "Have I the honour of addressing the future Mrs. Hardyman? May I offer

my best congratulations? What has become of our friend Alfred?"

Moody answered for Isabel. "If you will make inquiries at the cottage, Sir," he said, "you will find that you are mistaken, to say the least of it, in addressing your questions to this young lady."

Felix took off his hat again—with the most becoming appearance of surprise and distress.

"Something wrong, I fear?" he said, addressing Isabel, "I am, indeed, ashamed if I have ignorantly given you a moment's pain. Pray accept my most sincere apologies. I have only this instant arrived; my health would not allow me to be present at the luncheon. Permit me to express the earnest hope that matters may be set right to the satisfaction of all parties. Good afternoon!"

He bowed with elaborate courtesy, and turned back to the cottage.

"Who is that?" Isabel asked.

"Lady Lydiard's nephew, Mr. Felix Sweetsir," Moody answered, with a sudden sternness of tone, and a sudden coldness of manner, which surprised Isabel.

"You don't like him?" she said.

As she spoke, Felix stopped to give audience to one of the grooms, who had apparently been sent with a message to him. He turned so that his face was once more visible to Isabel. Moody pressed her hand significantly as it rested on his arm.

"Look well at that man," he whispered. "It's time to warn you. Mr. Felix Sweetsir is the worst enemy you have!"

Isabel heard him in speechless astonishment. He went on in tones that trembled with suppressed emotion.

"You doubt if Sharon knows the thief. You doubt if I know the thief. Isabel! as certainly as the heaven is above us, there stands the wretch who stole the bank-note!"

She drew her hand out of his arm with a cry of terror. She looked at him as if she doubted whether he was in his right mind.

He took her hand, and waited a moment trying to compose himself.

"Listen to me," he said. "At the first consultation I had with Sharon he gave this advice to Mr. Troy and to me. He said, 'Suspect the very last person on whom suspicion could possibly fall.' Those words, taken with the questions he had asked before he pronounced his opinion, struck through me as if he had struck me with a knife. I instantly suspected Lady Lydiard's nephew. Wait! From that time to this I have said nothing of my suspicion to any living soul. I knew in my own heart that it took its rise in the inveterate dislike that I have always felt for Mr. Sweetsir, and I distrusted it accordingly. But I went back to Sharon, for all that, and put the case into his hands. His investigations informed me that Mr. Sweetsir owed 'debts of honour' (as gentlemen call them), incurred through lost bets, to a large number of persons, and among them a bet of five hundred pounds lost to Mr. Hardyman. Further inquiries showed that Mr. Hardyman had taken the lead in declaring that he would post Mr. Sweetsir as a defaulter, and have him

turned out of his clubs, and turned out of the betting-ring. Ruin stared him in the face if he failed to pay his debt to Mr. Hardyman on the last day left to him —the day after the note was lost. On that very morning Lady Lydiard, speaking to me of her nephew's visit to her, said, "If I had given him an opportunity of speaking, Felix would have borrowed money of me; I saw it in his face." One moment more, Isabel. I am not only certain that Mr. Sweetsir took the five hundred pound note out of the open letter, I am firmly persuaded that he is the man who told Lord Rotherfield of the circumstances under which you left Lady Lydiard's house. Your marriage to Mr. Hardyman might have put you in a position to detect the theft. You, not I, might, in that case, have discovered from your husband that the stolen note was the note with which Mr. Sweetsir paid his debt. He came here, you may depend on it, to make sure that he had succeeded in destroying your prospects. A more depraved villain at heart than that man never swung from a gallows!"

He checked himself at those words. The shock of the disclosure, the passion and vehemence with which he spoke, overwhelmed Isabel. She trembled like a frightened child.

While he was still trying to soothe and reassure her, a low whining made itself heard at their feet. They looked down, and saw Tommie. Finding himself noticed at last, he expressed his sense of relief by a bark. Something dropped out of his mouth. As Moody stopped to pick it up, the dog ran to Isabel and pushed his head against her feet, as his way was when he expected to have the handkerchief thrown

over him, preparatory to one of those games at hide and seek which have been already mentioned. Isabel put out her hand to caress him, when she was stopped by a cry from Moody. It was *his* turn to tremble now. His voice faltered as he said the words, "The dog has found the pocket-book!"

He opened the book with shaking hands. A betting-book was bound up in it, with the customary calendar. He turned to the date of the day after the robbery.

There was the entry:—"Felix Sweetsir. Paid £500. Note numbered, N 8, 70564; dated 15th May, 1875."

Moody took from his waistcoat-pocket his own memorandum of the number of the lost bank-note. "Read it, Isabel," he said. "I won't trust my memory."

She read it. The number and date of the note entered in the pocket-book, exactly corresponded with the number and date of the note that Lady Lydiard had placed in her letter.

Moody handed the pocket-book to Isabel. "There is the proof of your innocence," he said, "thanks to the dog! Will you write and tell Mr. Hardyman what has happened?" he asked, with his head down, and his eyes on the ground.

She answered him, with the bright colour suddenly flowing over her face.

"*You* shall write to him," she said, "when the time comes."

"What time?" he asked.

She threw her arms round his neck, and hid her face on his bosom.

"The time," she whispered, "when I am your wife."

A low growl from Tommie reminded them that he too had some claim to be noticed.

Isabel dropped on her knees, and saluted her old play-fellow with the heartiest kisses she had ever given him since the day when their acquaintance began. "You darling!" she said, as she put him down again, "what can I do to reward you?"

Tommie rolled over on his back—more slowly than usual, in consequence of his luncheon in the tent. He elevated his four paws in the air, and looked lazily at Isabel out of his bright brown eyes. If ever a dog's look spoke yet, Tommie's look said, "I have eaten too much; rub my stomach."

POSTSCRIPT.

Persons of a speculative turn of mind are informed that the following document is for sale, and are requested to mention what sum they will give for it.

"I O U Lady Lydiard, five hundred pounds (£500), Felix Sweetsir."

Her Ladyship became possessed of this pecuniary remittance under circumstances which surround it with a halo of romantic interest. It was the last communication she was destined to receive from her accomplished nephew; and there was a Note attached to it, which cannot fail to enhance its value in the estimation of all right-minded persons who assist the circulation of paper money.

The lines that follow are strictly confidential:—

"Note.—Our excellent Moody informs me, my dear aunt, that you have decided (against his advice) on

refusing to prosecute.' I have not the slightest idea of what he means; but I am very much obliged to him, nevertheless, for reminding me of a circumstance which is of some interest to yourself personally.

"I am on the point of retiring to the Continent in search of health. One generally forgets something important when one starts on a journey. Before Moody called, I had entirely forgotten to mention that I had the pleasure of borrowing five hundred pounds of you some little time since.

"On the occasion to which I refer, your language and manner suggested that you would not lend me the money if I asked for it. Obviously, the only course left was to take it without asking. I took it while Moody was gone to get me some Curaçoa; and I returned to the picture-gallery in time to receive that delicious liqueur from the footman's hands.

"You will naturally ask why I found it necessary to supply myself (if I may borrow an expression from the language of State finance) with this 'forced loan.' I was actuated by motives which I think do me honour. My position at the time was critical in the extreme. My credit with the money-lenders was at an end; my friends had all turned their backs on me. I must either take the money or disgrace my family. If there is a man living who is sincerely attached to his family, I am that man. I took the money.

"Conceive your position as my aunt (I say nothing of myself), if I had adopted the other alternative. Turned out of the Jockey Club, turned out of Tattersalls', turned out of the betting ring; in short, posted publicly as a defaulter before the noblest institution in England, the Turf—and all for want of five hundred

pounds to stop the mouth of the greatest brute I know of, Alfred Hardyman! Let me not harrow your feelings (and mine) by dwelling on it. Dear and admirable woman! To you belongs the honour of saving the credit of the family; I can claim nothing but the inferior merit of having offered you the opportunity.

"My I O U, it is needless to say, accompanies these lines. Can I do anything for you abroad?—F. S."

To this it is only necessary to add (first) that Moody was perfectly right in believing F. S. to be the person who informed Hardyman's father of Isabel's position when she left Lady Lydiard's house; and (secondly) that Felix did really forward Mr. Troy's narrative of the theft to the French police, altering nothing in it but the number of the lost bank-note.

What is there left to write about? Nothing is left—but to say good-bye (very sorrowfully on the writer's part) to the Persons of the Story.

Good-bye to Miss Pink—who will regret to her dying day that Isabel's answer to Hardyman was No.

Good-bye to Lady Lydiard—who differs with Miss Pink, and would have regretted it, to *her* dying day, if the answer had been Yes.

Good-bye to Moody and Isabel—whose history has closed with the closing of the clergyman's book on their wedding-day.

Good-bye to Hardyman—who has sold his farm and his horses, and has begun a new life among the famous fast trotters of America.

Good-bye to old Sharon—who, a martyr to his

promise, brushed his hair and washed his face
honour of Moody's marriage; and catching a se
cold as the necessary consequence, declared, in
intervals of sneezing, that he would "never d
again."

And last, not least, good-bye to Tommie?
The writer gave Tommie his dinner not half an h
since, and is too fond of him to say good-bye.

END OF "MY LADY'S MONEY."

PERCY AND THE PROPHET:

EVENTS IN THE LIVES

OF A LADY AND HER LOVERS.

FIRST WORDS.

THE late Lieutenant-Colonel Bervie was generally very willing to tell the eventful love-story of his youthful days to any persons who were really desirous of hearing it. In relating, at the outset of his narrative, the extraordinary manner in which a total stranger foretold certain events which affected the happiness of two other persons besides himself, he never laid any claims to the unquestioning belief of his audience. 'Form your own opinion, friends," he used to say. 'Whether I am relating a series of marvels or a series of coincidences, I give you my word of honour I am telling you the truth. If this assurance does not satisfy you, I can only recommend the same modest view of questions that are beyond the range of our own experience, which wise Shakespeare advocates in those well-known lines: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy.' "

So the old soldier spoke, when years had taught him to be tolerant of all men, in the peaceful evening of his life.

The story is once more told in these pages, with the colonel's reservations, though not always in the colonel's language. For example, the noble conduct of one of the characters (to which he never did justice) will now be found to occupy the prominent place on the scene that is fairly its due.

THE STORY.

PART I. THE PREDICTION.

CHAPTER I.

The Quack.

THE disasters that follow the hateful offence against Christianity, which men call War, were severely felt in England during the peace that ensued on the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo. At this melancholy period of our national history, agriculture, manufactures, and commerce suffered an unexampled depression. The deficiency in the revenue was publicly acknowledged in Parliament to be alarming. With rare exceptions, distress prevailed among all classes of the community. The starving nation was ripe and ready for a revolutionary rising against its rulers—the rulers who had shed the people's blood and wasted the people's substance in a war which had yielded to the popular interests absolutely nothing in return.

Among the unfortunate persons who were driven, during the disastrous early years of this century, to strange shifts and devices to obtain the means of living, was a certain obscure medical man, of French extraction, named Lagarde. The doctor (duly qualified in England as well as in his own country to bear the title) was an inhabitant of London, living in one of the

narrow streets which connect the great thoroughfare of the Strand with the banks of the Thames.

The method of obtaining employment chosen by poor Lagarde, as the one alternative left in the face of starvation, was, and is still, considered by the medical profession to be the method of a quack. He advertised in the public journals.

In language studiously free from pretence or exaggeration, the French physician declared himself to have been converted to a belief in animal magnetism (as it was then called), by serious study of the discoveries first announced in France by the famous Mesmer. The two classes of the community to which his appeal was addressed were (first) persons of the invalid sort, afflicted with maladies which ordinary medical practice had failed to cure; and (secondly) persons disposed towards mystical investigation, who might be inclined to test the power of "clairvoyance" as a means of revealing the hidden chances and changes of the future. "No fee is exacted from those who may honour me with their confidence," the doctor modestly added, "because I cannot guarantee beforehand that I shall be successful in ministering to their necessities and wishes. The process that I employ is no secret: it was first made public long before my time. I am thrown into a magnetic sleep; and the hand of the person who consults me is placed in mine. The result depends entirely on mysterious laws of nervous sympathy and nervous insight, to the existence of which I can testify, but which (in the present state of scientific enquiry) I am not able to explain. Those whom I am fortunate enough to satisfy are requested to drop their offerings, according to their means, into a money-box fixed on

the waiting-room table. Those whom I do not satisfy will be pleased to accept the expression of my regret, and will not be expected to give anything. It is quite possible that I may be the dupe of mistaken convictions: all I ask of the public is to believe that they are at least the convictions of an honest man. I have only to add that ladies and gentlemen who may wish to give me a trial will find me at home in the evening, between the hours of six and ten."

Towards the close of the year 1816, this strange advertisement became a general topic of conversation among educated people in London. For some weeks the "sittings" of the seer were largely attended, and (all things considered) were not badly remunerated. A faithful few believed in him, and told wonderful stories of what he had pronounced and prophesied in his state of trance. The majority of his visitors simply viewed him in the light of a public amusement, and wondered why such a gentlemanlike man should have chosen to gain his living by exhibiting himself as a quack.

CHAPTER II.

The Numbers.

On a raw and snowy evening towards the latter part of January, 1817, a gentleman, walking along the Strand, turned into the street in which Doctor Lagarde lived, and knocked at the mesmerist's door. The gentleman was young and handsome, with a certain peculiarity in his gait which revealed him as belonging to the military profession. His dress studiously avoided the exaggerations and absurdities of the hideous fashion prevailing in those days. In a word, the outward mark

set on him was the mark which unmistakably proclaims a well-bred man.

He was admitted by an elderly male servant to a waiting-room on the first floor. The light of one little lamp, placed on a bracket fixed to the wall, was so obscured by a dark green shade as to make it difficult, if not impossible, for visitors meeting by accident to recognise each other. The metal money-box fixed to the table was just visible. In the flickering light of a small fire, the stranger perceived the figures of three men seated, apart and silent, who were the only occupants of the room besides himself. The wretched weather had, no doubt, kept the doctor's lady-visitors at home. So far as objects were to be seen, there was nothing to attract attention in the waiting-room. The furniture was plain and neat, and nothing more. The elderly servant handed a card, with a number inscribed on it, to the new visitor, said in a whisper, "Your number will be called, sir, in your turn," and disappeared. For some minutes nothing disturbed the deep silence but the faint ticking of a clock. After a while a bell rang from an inner room, a door opened, and a gentleman appeared, whose interview with Doctor Lagarde had terminated. His opinion of the sitting was openly expressed in one emphatic word—"Humbug!" No contribution dropped from his hand as he passed the money-box on his way out.

The next number (being Number Fifteen) was called by the elderly servant, and the first incident occurred in the strange series of events destined to happen in the doctor's house that night.

One after another the three men who had been waiting rose, examined their cards under the light of

the lamp, and sat down again surprised and disappointed. The servant advanced to investigate the matter. The numbers possessed by the three visitors, instead of being Fifteen, Sixteen, and Seventeen, proved to be Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen. Turning to the stranger who had arrived the last, the servant said:

"Have I made a mistake, sir? My sight is not so good as it was, and I am afraid I have awkwardly confused the cards in this dark place. Have I given you Number Fifteen instead of Number Eighteen?"

The gentleman produced his card. A mistake had certainly been made, but not the mistake that the servant supposed. The card held by the latest visitor turned out to be the card previously held by the dissatisfied stranger who had just left the room—Number Fourteen! As to the card numbered Fifteen, it was only discovered the next morning lying in a corner, dropped on the floor!

Acting on his first impulse, the servant hurried out of the room, calling to the gentleman who had been the original holder of Fourteen to come back and bear his testimony to that fact. The street-door had been opened for him by the landlady of the house. She was a pretty woman—and the gentleman had fortunately lingered to talk to her. He was induced, at the intercession of the landlady, to ascend the stairs again. On returning to the waiting-room, he addressed a characteristic question to the assembled visitors. "*More* humbug?" asked the gentleman who liked to talk to a pretty woman.

The servant—completely puzzled by his own stupidity—attempted to make his apologies.

"Pray forgive me, gentlemen," he said. "I am afraid I have confused the cards I distribute with the cards returned to me. In the case of mistakes of any kind I am ordered to set them right on the spot. In *this* case, I think I had better consult my master."

He disappeared in the inner room. Left by themselves, the visitors began to speak jestingly of the strange situation in which they were placed. The original holder of Number Fourteen described his own experience of the doctor in his own pithy way. "I applied to the fellow to tell my fortune. He first went to sleep over it, and then he said he could tell me nothing. I asked why. 'I don't know,' says he. '*I* do,' says I—'humbug!' I'll bet you the long odds, gentlemen, that *you* find it humbug too."

Before the wager could be accepted or declined, the door of the inner room was opened again. The tall, lean, black figure of a new personage appeared on the threshold, relieved darkly against the light in the room behind him. A singularly quiet, sad voice addressed the visitors in these words:

"Gentlemen, I must beg your indulgence. The apparent accident which has given to the last comer the number already held by a gentleman who has unsuccessfully consulted me, may have a meaning which we can none of us at present see. Observe, I don't speak positively, I only say it may be. If the three visitors who have been so good as to wait, will allow the present holder of Number Fourteen to consult me out of his turn—and if the earlier visitor who left me dissatisfied with his consultation will consent to stay here a little longer—I pledge myself, if nothing happens during the first ten minutes of the interview, to

receive the gentlemen who have yet to consult me, and to detain no longer the gentleman who has seen me already. On the other hand, if anything does happen, there is a chance at least that one among you —most likely the original holder of Number Fourteen —may be concerned in it. Under these circumstances, is ten minutes' patience too much to ask of you?"

The three visitors who had waited longest consulted among themselves, and (having nothing better to do with their time) decided on accepting the doctor's proposal. The visitor who believed it all to be "humbug" coolly took a gold coin out of his pocket, tossed it into the air, caught it in his closed hand, and walked up to the shaded lamp on the bracket. "Heads, stay," he said, "Tails, go." He opened his hand, and looked at the coin. "Heads! Very good. Go on with your hocus-pocus, sir—I'll wait."

"You believe in chance," said the doctor, quietly observing him. "That is not my experience of life."

He paused to let the stranger who held Number Fourteen pass him into the inner room—then followed, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER III.

The Consultation.

THE consulting-room was better lit than the waiting-room, and that was the only difference between the two. In the one as in the other, no attempt was made to impress the imagination. Everywhere, the commonplace furniture of a London lodging-house was left

without the slightest effort to alter or improve it by changes of any kind.

Seen under the clearer light, Doctor Lagarde appeared to be the last person living who would consent to degrade himself by an attempt at imposture of any kind. His eyes were the dreamy eyes of a visionary; his look was the prematurely-aged look of a student, accustomed to give the hours to his book which ought to have been given to his bed. To state it briefly, the disciple of Mesmer was a man who might easily be deceived by others, but who was incapable of consciously practising deception himself. Signing to his visitor to take a chair, he seated himself on the opposite side of the small table that stood between them—waited a moment with his face hidden in his hands, as if to collect himself—and then spoke.

"Do you come to consult me on a case of illness?" he enquired, "or do you ask me to look into the darkness which hides your future life?"

The stranger answered gravely: "I have no need to consult you about my health. I come to hear what you can tell me of my future life."

"You know that I can try," pursued the doctor; "but that I cannot promise to succeed?"

"I accept your conditions," the stranger rejoined. "I neither believe nor disbelieve. If you will excuse my speaking frankly, I mean to observe you closely, and to decide for myself."

Doctor Lagarde smiled sadly.

"You have heard of me as a charlatan who contrives to amuse a few idle people," he said. "I don't complain of that; my present position leads necessarily to misinterpretation of myself and my motives. Still I

may at least say that I am the victim of a sincere avowal of my belief in a great science. Yes! I repeat it, a great science! New, I daresay, to the generation we live in, though it was known and practised in the days when the pyramids were built. My sincerity in this matter has cost me the income that I derived from my medical practice. Patients distrust me; doctors refuse to consult with me. I could starve if I had no one to think of but myself. But I have another person to consider, who is very dear to me; and I am driven, literally driven, either to turn beggar in the streets, or to do what I am doing now. Everything is against me. I am a needy foreigner (naturally distrusted in this country). I am a republican and a socialist (naturally exiled from my own country). Who will help such an outlawed man as I am? It doesn't matter. The age is advancing; and the great truths which it is my misfortune to advocate before the time is ripe for them, are steadily forcing their way to recognition. They will conquer yet, when the hard struggle of life is over for the poor quack who now presumes to speak to you. Enough (and too much) of myself! Let us, as you say in England, get to business. To be of any use to you, I must first be thrown into the magnetic trance. The person who has the strongest influence over me is the person who will do it to-night." He paused, and looked round towards the corner of the room behind him. "Mother," he said, gently, "are you ready?"

An elderly lady, dressed in deep mourning, rose from her seat in the corner. She had been, thus far, hidden from notice by the high back of the easy-chair in which her son sat. Excepting some folds of fine

black lace, laid over her white hair so as to form a head dress at once simple and picturesque, there was nothing remarkable in her attire. The visitor, well accustomed to the society of women of high rank and breeding, rose and bowed, as if (stranger though she was to him) he recognised a person of distinction. She gravely returned his salute, and moved round the table so as to place herself opposite to her son.

"When you please, Henry," she said.

Bending over him, she took both the doctor's hands in hers, and fixed her eyes steadily on his. No words passed between them; nothing more took place. In a minute or two, his head was resting against the back of the chair, and his eyelids had closed.

"Are you sleeping?" asked Madame Lagarde.

"I am sleeping," he answered.

She laid his hands gently on the arms of the chair, and turned to address the visitor.

"Let the sleep gain on him for a minute or two more," she said. "Then take one of his hands, and put to him what questions you please."

"Does he hear us now, madam?"

"You might fire off a pistol, sir, close to his ear, and he would not hear it. The vibration might disturb him; that is all. Until you or I touch him, and so establish the nervous sympathy, he is as lost to all sense of our presence here, as if he were dead."

"You believe in magnetism yourself, of course?"

"My son's belief, sir, is mine, in this thing as in other things. I have heard what he has been saying to you. It is for me that he sacrifices himself by holding these exhibitions; it is in my poor interests that his hardly-earned money is made. I am in in-

firm health; and remonstrate as I may, my son persists in providing for me, not the bare comforts only, but even the luxuries of life. Except in this, he has never heard me express a wish without cheerfully obeying it. Whatever I may suffer, I have my compensation; I can still thank God for giving me the greatest happiness that a woman can enjoy—the possession of a good son." She smiled fondly as she looked at the sleeping man. "Draw your chair nearer to him," she resumed, "and take his hand. You may speak freely in making your enquiries. Nothing that happens in this room ever goes out of it."

With those words she returned to her place, in the corner behind her son's chair.

The visitor took Doctor Lagarde's hand. As they touched each other, he was conscious of a faintly-titillating sensation in his own hand—a sensation which oddly reminded him of bygone experiments with an electrical machine, in the days when he was a boy at school!

"I wish to question you about my future life," he began. "How ought I to begin?"

The doctor spoke his first words in the monotonous tones of a man talking in his sleep.

"Own your true motive before you begin," he said. "Your interest in your future life is centred in a woman. She has not positively rejected you, and she has not openly encouraged you, in the time that is past. You wish to know if her heart will be yours in the time that is to come—and there your interest in your future life ends."

This startling assertion of the sleeper's capacity to look, by sympathy, into his mind, and to see there his

most secret thoughts, instead of convincing the stranger, excited his suspicions. "You have means of getting information," he said roughly, "that I don't understand."

The doctor laughed, as if the idea amused him. Madame Lagarde rose from her place, and interposed.

"Hundreds of strangers come here to consult my son," she said quietly. "If you believe that we know who those strangers are, and that we have the means of enquiring into their private lives before they enter this room, you believe in something much more incredible than the magnetic sleep!"

This was too manifestly true to be disputed. The visitor (a man of strong good sense, when his temper was not ruffled) made his apologies.

"I should like to have *some* explanation," he added. "The thing is so very extraordinary. How can I prevail upon Doctor Lagarde to enlighten me?"

"He can only tell you what he sees," Madame Lagarde answered; "ask him that, and you will get a direct reply. Say to him: 'Do you see the lady?'"

The stranger repeated the question. The reply followed at once, in these words:

"I see darkness all about me, except in one place, where there is light like the light of a dim moon. In the illuminated space, I see two figures standing side by side. One of them is your figure. The other is the figure of a lady. She only appears dimly. I can see nothing but that she is taller than women generally are, and that she is dressed in pale blue."

The stranger started at those last words. "Her favourite colour!" he thought to himself, forgetting

that, while he held the doctor's hand, the doctor could think with *his* mind.

"Yes," added the sleeper, quietly, "her favourite colour, as you know. She fades and fades as I look at her," he went on. "She is gone. I only see you. Your hands are over your face; you are crying; you look like a man who is suffering from some dreadful disappointment. Wait a little. You too are growing indistinct; you too fade away altogether. The darkness gathers. I see nothing."

A pause of silence followed. Then the face of the sleeper began to show signs of disturbance for the first time. The stranger put the customary question to him: "What do you see?"

"I see you again. You have a pistol in your hand. Opposite to you, there stands the figure of another man. He, too, has a pistol in his hand. Are you enemies? Are you meeting to fight a duel? Is the lady the cause? I try, but I fail to see her."

"Can you describe the man?"

"Not yet. So far, he is only a shadow in the form of a man."

There was another interval. The appearance of disturbance grew more marked on the sleeper's face. Suddenly, he waved his free hand in the direction of the waiting-room.

"Send for the visitors who are there," he said. "They are all to come in. Each one of them is to take one of my hands in turn—while you remain where you are, holding the other. Don't let go of me, even for a moment. My mother will ring."

Madame Lagarde touched a bell on the table. The servant received his orders from her and retired. After

a short absence, he appeared again in the consulting-room, with one visitor only waiting on the threshold behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

The Man.

"THE other three gentlemen have gone away, madam," the servant explained, addressing Madame Lagarde. "They were tired of waiting. I found *this* gentleman fast asleep; and I am afraid he is angry with me for taking the liberty of waking him."

"Sleep of the common sort is evidently not allowed in this house," the gentleman remarked at the door. "It isn't my fault—I couldn't mesmerise myself, could I?"

The speaker entered the room, and stood revealed as the original owner of the card numbered Fourteen. Viewed by the clear lamp-light, he was a tall, finely-made man, in the prime of life, with a florid complexion, golden-brown hair, and sparkling blue eyes. Noticing Madame Lagarde, he instantly checked the flow of his satire, with the instinctive good-breeding of a gentleman. "I beg your pardon," he said; "I have a great many faults, and a habit of making bad jokes is one of them. Is the servant right, madam, in telling me that I have the honour of presenting myself here at your request?"

Madame Lagarde briefly explained what had passed. The florid gentleman (still privately believing it to be all "humbug") was delighted to make himself of any use. "I congratulate you, sir," he said, with his easy humour, as he passed the visitor who had taken his

card. "Number Fourteen seems to be a luckier number in your keeping than it was in mine."

As he spoke, he took Doctor Lagarde's disengaged hand. The instant they touched each other, the sleeper started. His voice rose; his face flushed. "You are the man!" he exclaimed. "I see you plainly, now!"

"What am I doing?"

"You are standing opposite to the gentleman here who is holding my other hand; and you are lifting a pistol to take aim at him."

The unbeliever cast a shrewd look at his companion in the consultation. His inveterate habit of taking the ironical view of everything got the better of him again.

"Considering that you and I are total strangers, sir," he said, "don't you think the doctor had better introduce us, before he goes any farther? We have got to fighting a duel already, and we may as well know who we are, before the pistols go off." He turned to Doctor Lagarde. "Dramatic situations don't amuse me out of the theatre," he resumed. "Let me put you to a very commonplace test. I want to be introduced to this gentleman. Has he told you his name?"

"No."

"Of course, you know it, without being told?"

"Certainly. I have only to look into your own knowledge of yourselves while I am in this trance, and while you have got my hands, to know both your names, as well as you do."

"Introduce us, then!" retorted the jesting gentleman. "And take my name first."

"Mr. Percy Linwood," replied the doctor; "I have the honour of presenting you to Captain Bervie, of the Artillery."

With one accord, the gentlemen both dropped Doctor Lagarde's hands, and looked at each other in blank amazement.

"Of course he has discovered our names somehow!" said Mr. Percy Linwood, cutting the Gordian knot to his own perfect satisfaction in that way.

Captain Bervie had not forgotten what Madame Lagarde had said to him, when he too had suspected a trick. He now repeated it (quite ineffectually) for Mr. Linwood's benefit. "If you don't feel the force of that argument as I feel it," he added, "perhaps, as a favour to me, sir, you will not object to our each taking the doctor's hand again, and hearing what more he can tell us while he remains in the state of trance?"

"With the greatest pleasure!" answered good-humoured Mr. Linwood. "Our friend is beginning to amuse me; I am as anxious as you are to know what he is going to see next."

Captain Bervie put the next question.

"You have seen us fighting a duel—can you tell us the result?"

"I can tell you nothing more than I have told you already. The figures of the duellists have faded away, like the other figures that I saw before them. What I see now looks like the winding gravel path of a garden. A man and a woman are walking towards me. The man stops, and places a ring on the woman's finger, and kisses her."

Captain Bervie changed colour, and said no more.

Mr. Linwood put the next question, in his usual flippant way.

"Who is the happy man?" he asked.

"*You* are the happy man," was the instantaneous reply.

"Who is the woman?" cried Captain Bervie, before Mr. Linwood could speak again.

"The same woman whom I saw before; dressed in the same way, in pale blue."

Captain Bervie was not satisfied. He insisted on receiving clearer information than this. "Surely, you can see *something* of her personal appearance?" he said sharply.

"I can see that she has long dark-brown hair, falling below her waist. I can see that she has lovely dark-brown eyes. Her complexion seems to be all of the same delicate pale colour: she has the look of a sensitive, nervous person. She is quite young. I can see no more."

"Is there any other man present in the garden?" was the captain's next question.

"I can see no other man."

"Look again at the man who is putting the ring on her finger. Are you sure that the face you see is the face of Mr. Percy Linwood?"

"I am absolutely sure."

Captain Bervie rose from his chair.

"Thank you, Doctor Lagarde," he said. "I have heard enough."

He walked to the door. Mr. Percy Linwood dropped the doctor's hand, and appealed to the retiring captain with a broad stare of astonishment.

"You don't really believe this?" he said.

"I only say I have heard enough," Captain Bervie answered irritably.

Mr. Linwood could hardly fail to see that any further attempt to treat the matter lightly might lead to undesirable results. "It is difficult to speak seriously of this kind of exhibition," he resumed quietly. "But I suppose I may mention a mere matter of fact without meaning, or giving, offence. The description of the lady, I can positively declare, does not apply in any single particular to anyone whom I know."

Captain Bervie turned round sternly at the door, with the look of a man whose patience was completely exhausted. Mr. Linwood's unruffled composure, assisted in its influence by the presence of Madame Lagarde, seemed to remind him of the claims of politeness. He checked the rash words as they rose to his lips. "You may make new acquaintances, sir," was all that he said. "*You* have the future before you."

Upon that, he went out. Percy Linwood waited a little, reflecting on the captain's conduct. Had Doctor Lagarde's description of the lady accidentally answered the description of a living lady whom Captain Bervie knew? Was he by any chance in love with her; and had the doctor innocently reminded him that his love was not returned? Assuming this to be likely, was it also possible that he believed in the duel seen by the mesmerist? Did he seriously interpret his absence from the visionary love-scene in the garden, as an intimation that he was the duellist who was destined to fall? Nobody but a madman could go to those lengths. The captain's conduct was simply incomprehensible.

Pondering these questions, Percy decided on returning to his place by the doctor's chair. "Of one

thing I'm certain, at any rate," he thought to himself. "I'll see the whole imposture out before I leave the house!"

He took Doctor Lagarde's hand. "Now, then! what is the next discovery?" he asked abruptly. "Anything more about the lady and gentleman in the garden?"

The answer was given in low, languid tones; the sleeper was evidently beginning to suffer from nervous fatigue.

"I see no more of the garden," he said, "or of the persons in it. What I see now is a small room, like a cottage parlour. The woman who has appeared to me throughout presents herself to me again. But, this time, the man who is with her is no longer Mr. Percy Linwood—the man is Captain Bervie!"

Percy smiled satirically. "Good news for the captain!" he said. "It's a thousand pities he went away. If he had waited he would have heard something personally interesting to him. May I ask, Doctor Lagarde, how Captain Bervie and the lady are occupied?"

The sleeper seemed to find some difficulty in answering the question. "I can only see," he said, "that the woman is painfully agitated by something that the captain is saying to her. He puts her arm in his—he seems to be trying to persuade her to leave the room with him. She hesitates; she asks him with tears to release her. He whispers something in her ear, which seems to persuade her. She considers; she says a few words on her side; she yields. He leads her out of the room. The darkness gathers behind them. I look and look, and I can see no more."

"Shall we wait awhile?" Percy suggested, "and then try again?"

Doctor Lagarde sighed, and reclined in his chair. "My head is heavy," he said; "my spirits are dull. I will try again to please you. Don't blame me if I fail."

After an interval, Percy put the customary question. The sleeper answered wearily.

"I see the inside of a travelling-carriage," he said. "The lady is one of the persons in it. There is a man with her. There is——" He stopped, and began to breathe heavily: the grasp of his hand relaxed.

"Am I the man this time?" Percy asked; "or is it Captain Bervie again?"

Doctor Lagarde roused himself by a last effort. "I can't tell you," he murmured drowsily. "My eyes are aching; the darkness baffles me. I have toiled long enough for you. Drop my hand and leave me to rest."

Hearing those words, Madame Lagarde approached her son's chair.

"It will be useless, sir, to ask him any more questions to-night," she said. "He has been weak and nervous all day, and he is worn out by the effort he has made. Pardon me, if I ask you to step aside for a moment, while I give him the repose that he needs."

She laid her right hand gently on the doctor's head, and kept it there for a minute or so. "Are you at rest now?" she asked.

"I am at rest," he answered, in faint, drowsy tones.

Madame Lagarde returned to Percy. "If you are not yet satisfied," she said, "my son will be at your service to-morrow evening, sir."

"Thank you, madam, I have only one more ques-

tion to ask, and you can no doubt answer it. When your son wakes, will he remember what he has said to Captain Bervie and to myself?"

"My son will be as absolutely ignorant of everything that he has seen, and of everything that he has said, in the trance, as if he had been at the other end of the world."

Percy Linwood swallowed this last outrageous assertion with an effort which he was quite unable to conceal. "Many thanks, madam," he said; "I wish you good-night."

Returning to the waiting-room, he noticed the money-box fixed to the table. "These people look poor," he thought to himself, "and I feel really indebted to them for an amusing evening. Besides, I can afford to be liberal, for I shall certainly never go back." He dropped a five-pound note into the money-box, and left the house.

Walking towards his club, Percy's natural serenity of mind was a little troubled by the remembrance of Captain Bervie's strange language and conduct. Something in the captain's manner, rudely as he had spoken on leaving the room, had interested Percy in spite of himself. He began to consider the propriety of reducing to writing Doctor Lagarde's description of the scenes in the cottage parlour and the travelling-carriage, in the event of another meeting between Captain Bervie and himself. If the captain persisted in taking the thing seriously, the memorandum might additionally enlighten him. If, on the other hand, he ended in adopting the rational view, the memorandum might confirm him in taking that sensible course.

Arrived at his club, Percy resolutely set to work in

the writing-room. Unhappily for his chances of success, he was one of that large number of persons whose minds become confused the moment they take a pen in their hands. First, he tried to report the doctor's language literally, and failed to remember it when he put the first words on paper. Then he attempted a brief summary, and lost the thread of his narrative at the second sentence. After spoiling many sheets of paper, and using every new pen within his reach, he gave up the struggle. "It's no use," he said, as he got up from the writing-table. "I am too great a fool to do it, and there's an end of the business!"

He never was more mistaken in his life. The end of the business was not to come for many a long day yet.

PART II.

THE FULFILMENT.

CHAPTER V.

The Ball-room.

WHILE the consultation at Doctor Lagarde's was still fresh in the memory of the persons present at it, Chance or Destiny, occupied in sowing the seeds for the harvest of the future, discovered as one of its fit instruments a retired military officer named Major Much.

The major was a smart little man, who persisted in setting up the appearance of youth as a means of hiding the reality of fifty. After serving with distinction in many parts of the world, Major Much had become an independent man, by inheriting an estate in one of the midland counties. Being still a bachelor, and being always ready to make himself agreeable, he was generally popular in the society of women. In the ball-room he was a really welcome addition to the company. The German waltz had then been imported into England little more than three years since. The outcry raised against the dance, by persons skilled in the discovery of latent impropriety, had not yet lost its influence in certain quarters. Men who could waltz were scarce. Major Much had successfully grappled with the difficulties of learning the dance in mature life;

and the young ladies rewarded him nobly for the effort, by taking the appearance of youth for granted, in the palpable presence of fifty.

Knowing everybody and being welcome everywhere, playing a good hand at whist, and having an inexhaustible fancy in the invention of a dinner, Major Much naturally belonged to all the best clubs of his time. Percy Linwood and he constantly met in the billiard-room or at the dinner-table. The major approved of the easy, handsome, pleasant-tempered young man. "I have lost the first freshness of youth," he used to say modestly of himself, "and I see it revived, as it were, in Percy. Naturally I like Percy."

About three weeks after the memorable evening at Doctor Lagarde's, the two friends encountered each other on the steps of a club.

"Got anything to do to-night?" asked the major.

"Nothing that I know of," said Percy, "unless I go to the theatre."

"Let the theatre wait, my boy. My old regiment gives a ball at Woolwich to-night. I have got a ticket to spare; and I know several sweet girls who are going. Some of them waltz, Percy! Gather your rosebuds while you may. Come with me."

The invitation was accepted as readily as it was given. The major found the carriage, and Percy paid for the post-horses. They entered the ball-room among the earlier guests; and the first person whom they met, waiting near the door, was—Captain Bervie.

Percy bowed, a little uneasily. "I feel some doubt," he said, laughing, "whether we have been properly introduced to one another or not."

"Not properly introduced!" cried Major Much. "I'll set that right. My dear friend, Percy Linwood; my dear friend, Arthur Bervie—be known to each other! esteem each other!"

Captain Bervie acknowledged the introduction by a cold salute. Percy, yielding to the good-natured impulse of the moment, began to speak of the mesmeric consultation.

"You missed something worth hearing when you left the doctor the other night," he said. "We continued the sitting; and *you* turned up again among the persons of the doctor's drama, in quite a new character. Imagine yourself, if you please, in a cottage parlour——"

"Excuse me for interrupting you," said Captain Bervie. "I am a member of the committee, charged with the arrangements of the ball, and I must really attend to my duties."

He withdrew without waiting for a reply. Percy looked round wonderingly at Major Much. "Strange!" he said, "I feel rather attracted towards Captain Bervie; and he seems so little attracted, on his side, that he can hardly behave to me with common civility. What does it mean?"

"I'll tell you," answered the major, confidentially. "Arthur Bervie is madly in love—madly is really the word, my boy—with a Miss Bowmore. And (this is between ourselves) the young lady doesn't feel it quite in the same way. A sweet girl; I've often had her on my knee when she was a child. Her father and mother are old friends of mine. She is coming to the ball tonight. That's the true reason why Arthur left you just now. Look at him—waiting to be the first to speak to

her. If he could have his way, he wouldn't let another man come near the poor girl all through the evening; he really persecutes her. I'll introduce you, Percy; and you will see how he looks at us for presuming to approach her. It's a great pity; she will never marry him. Arthur Bervie is a high-minded, honourable fellow, a man in a thousand; but he's fast becoming a perfect bear under the strain on his temper. What's the matter? You don't seem to be listening to me."

This last remark was perfectly justified. In telling the captain's love-story, Major Much had revived his young friend's memory of the lady in the blue dress, who had haunted the mesmeric visions of Doctor Lagarde. "Tell me," said Percy, "what is Miss Bowmore like? Is there anything remarkable in her personal appearance? I have a reason for asking."

As he spoke, there arose among the guests in the rapidly-filling ball-room a low murmur of surprise and admiration. The major laid one hand on Percy's shoulder, and, lifting the other, pointed to the door.

"What is Miss Bowmore like?" he repeated. "There she is, my boy! Let her answer for herself."

Percy turned towards the lower end of the room. A young lady was entering, dressed in plain silk, and the colour of it was a pale blue! Excepting a white rose at her breast, she wore no ornament of any sort. Doubly distinguished by the perfect simplicity of her apparel, and by her tall, supple, commanding figure, she took rank at once as the most remarkable woman in the room. Moving nearer to her through the crowd, under the guidance of the complaisant major, young Linwood gained a clearer view of her hair, her complexion, and the colour of her eyes.

In every one of these particulars, she was the living image of the woman described by Doctor Lagarde!

While Percy was absorbed over this strange discovery, Major Much had got within speaking distance of the young lady and of her mother, as they stood together in conversation with Captain Bervie. "My dear Mrs. Bowmore, how well you are looking! My dear Miss Charlotte, what a sensation you have made already!" cried the cordial little man. "The glorious simplicity (if I may so express myself) of your dress is —is—what was I going to say?—the ideas come thronging on me; I merely want words."

Here Major Much waved his hand, with all the fingers well open, as if words were circulating in the air of the room, and he meant to catch them. Miss Charlotte burst into a little silvery laugh; her magnificent brown eyes, wandering from the major to Percy, rested on the young man with a modest and momentary interest, which Captain Bervie's jealous attention instantly detected.

"They are forming the dance, Miss Bowmore," he said, pressing forward impatiently. "If we don't take our places, we shall be too late."

"Stop! stop!" cried the major. "There is a time for everything, and this is the time for presenting my dear friend here, Mr. Percy Linwood. He is like me, Miss Charlotte—*he* has been struck by the glorious simplicity, and *he* wants words." At this part of the presentation, he happened to look toward the irate captain, and instantly gave him a hint on the subject of his temper. "I say, Arthur Bervie! we are all good-humoured people here. What have you got on your eyebrows? It looks like a frown; and it doesn't be-

come you. Send for a skilled waiter, and have it brushed off and taken away directly!"

"May I ask, Miss Bowmore, if you are disengaged for the next dance?" said Percy, the moment the major gave him an opportunity of speaking.

"Miss Bowmore is engaged to *me* for the next dance," said the angry captain, before the young lady could answer.

"The third dance, then?" Percy persisted, in his quietest manner, and with his brightest smile.

"With pleasure, Mr. Linwood," said Miss Bowmore. She would have been no true woman if she had not resented the open exhibition of Arthur's jealousy; it was like asserting a right over her to which he had not the shadow of a claim. She threw a look at Percy as her partner led her away, which was the severest punishment she could inflict on the man who ardently loved her.

The third dance stood in the programme as a waltz. In jealous distrust of Percy, the captain took the conductor aside, and used his authority as committeeman to substitute another dance. He had no sooner turned his back on the orchestra than the wife of the colonel of the regiment, who had heard him, spoke to the conductor in her turn, and insisted on the original programme being retained. "Quote the colonel's authority," said the lady, "if Captain Bervie ventures to object." In the meantime, the captain, on his way to rejoin Charlotte, was met by one of his brother-officers, who summoned him to an impending debate of the committee, charged with the administrative arrangements of the supper-table.

"Surely they can do without me?" Arthur suggested.

"No," said the officer. "In case of any difference of opinion, the colonel requests that all the committee will attend."

Under these circumstances, Arthur had no alternative but to follow his brother-officer to the committee-room. Barely a minute later the conductor appeared at his desk, and the first notes of the music rose low and plaintive, introducing the third dance.

"Percy, my boy!" cried the major, recognising the melody, "you're in luck's way—it's going to be a waltz!"

Almost as he spoke, the low, plaintive notes glided by subtle modulations into the inspiriting air of the waltz. Percy claimed his partner's hand. Miss Charlotte hesitated, and looked at her mother.

"Surely you waltz?" said Percy.

"I have learnt to waltz," she answered modestly; "but this is such a large room, sir, and there are so many people!"

"Once round," Percy pleaded; "only once round!"

She looked again at her mother; her foot was keeping time with the music under her dress; her heart was beating with a delicious excitement; kind-hearted Mrs. Bowmore smiled and said, "Once round, my dear, as Mr. Linwood suggests."

In another moment, Percy's arm took possession of her waist, and they were away on the wings of the waltz! Could words describe, could thought realise, the exquisite enjoyment of the dance? Enjoyment? It was more—it was an epoch in Charlotte's life—it was the first time she had waltzed with a man. What

a difference between the fervent clasp of Percy's arm and the cold, formal contact of the mistress who had taught her! How brightly his eyes looked down into hers, admiring her with such a tender restraint, that there could surely be no harm in looking up at him now and then in return. Round and round they glided, absorbed in the music and in themselves. Occasionally her bosom just touched his, at those critical moments when she was most in need of support. At other intervals, she almost let her head sink on his shoulder in trying to hide from him the smile which acknowledged his admiration too boldly. "Once round," Percy had suggested; "once round," her mother had said. They had been twenty, thirty, forty times round; they had never stopped to rest like the other dancers; they had had the eyes of the whole room on them—including the eyes of Captain Bervie—without knowing it; her delicately pale complexion had changed to rosy-red; the neat arrangement of her hair had become disturbed; her bosom was rising and falling faster and faster in the effort to breathe—before the fatigue and the heat overpowered her at last, and forced her to say to him faintly, "I'm very sorry—I can't dance any more!"

Percy led her into the cooler atmosphere of the refreshment-room, and revived her with a glass of lemonade. Her arm still rested on his—she was just about to thank him for the care he had taken of her—when Captain Bervie entered the room. He was pale, with the marked and sinister pallor of suppressed rage; but, when he spoke to Percy, he still preserved his self-control, and expressed himself with scrupulous politeness.

"Mrs. Bowmore wishes me to take you back to her," he said to Charlotte. Then, turning to Percy, he added: "Will you kindly wait here while I take Miss Bowmore to the ball-room? I have a word to say to you—I will return directly."

Left alone in the refreshment-room, Percy sat down to cool and rest himself. With his experience of the ways of men, he felt no surprise at the marked contrast between Captain Bervie's face and Captain Bervie's manner. "He has seen us waltzing, and he is coming back to pick a quarrel with me." Such was the interpretation which Mr. Linwood's knowledge of the world placed on Captain Bervie's politeness. In a minute or two more the captain returned to the refreshment-room, and satisfied Percy that his anticipations had not deceived him.

CHAPTER VI.

Love and Politics.

It was the fourth day after the ball. Though it was no later in the year than the month of February, the sun was shining brightly, and the air was as soft as the air of a day in spring. Percy and Charlotte were walking together in the little garden at the back of Mr. Bowmore's cottage, near the town of Dartford, in Kent.

"Mr. Linwood," said Charlotte, "you were to have paid us your first visit the day after the ball. Why have you kept us waiting? Have you been too busy to remember your new friends?"

"I have counted the hours since we parted, Miss

Charlotte. If I had not been detained by business——"

"I understand! For three days business has controlled you. On the fourth day, you have controlled business—and here you are?"

"That's it exactly, Miss Charlotte."

"I don't believe one word of it, Mr. Percy!"

There was no answering such a declaration as this. Guiltily conscious that Charlotte was right in refusing to accept his well-worn excuse, Percy made an awkward attempt to change the topic of conversation. They happened, at the moment, to be standing near a small conservatory at the end of the garden. The glass door was closed, and the few plants and shrubs inside had a lonely, neglected look. "Does nobody ever visit this secluded place?" Percy asked, jocosely, "or does it hide discoveries in the rearing of plants, which are forbidden mysteries to a stranger?"

"Satisfy your curiosity, Mr. Linwood, by all means," Charlotte answered in the same tone. "Open the door; and I will follow you. There is a bench still left, I think, inside, and a few minutes' rest will be welcome to me."

Percy obeyed. In passing through the doorway, he encountered the bare hanging branches of some creeping plant, long since dead and detached from its fastenings on the woodwork of the roof. He pushed aside the branches so that Charlotte could easily follow him in, without being aware that his own forced passage through them had a little deranged the folds of spotless white cambric which a well-dressed gentleman wore round his neck in those days. Charlotte

seated herself on the bench, and directed Percy's attention to the desolate conservatory with a saucy smile.

"The mystery which your lively imagination has associated with this place," she said, "means, being interpreted, that we are too poor to keep a gardener. Make the best of your disappointment, Mr. Linwood, and sit here by me. We are out of hearing and out of sight of mamma's other visitors. You have no excuse now for not satisfying my curiosity and telling me what has really kept you away from us."

She fixed her eyes on him as she said those words. Before Percy could think of another excuse, her quick observation detected the disordered condition of his cravat, and discovered the upper edge of a black plaster attached to one side of his neck. "You have been hurt in the neck!" she exclaimed. "That is why you have kept away from us for the last three days!"

"A mere trifle," said Percy, in great confusion; "please don't notice it!"

She neither heeded nor heard him. Her eyes, still resting on his face, assumed an expression of suspicious enquiry, which Percy was entirely at a loss to understand. Suddenly, she started to her feet, as if a new idea had occurred to her. "Wait here," she said, flushing with excitement, "till I come back: I insist on it!"

Before Percy could ask for an explanation, she had left the conservatory.

In a minute or two she returned, with a newspaper in her hand. "Read that," she said, pointing to a

paragraph, distinguished by a line drawn round it in ink.

The passage that she indicated contained an account of a duel which had recently taken place in the neighbourhood of London. The names of the duellists were not mentioned. One was described as an officer and the other as a civilian. They had quarrelled at cards, and had fought with pistols. The civilian had had a narrow escape of his life. His antagonist's bullet had passed near enough to the side of his neck to tear the flesh, and had missed the vital parts, literally, by a hair's breadth.

Charlotte's eyes, riveted on Percy, detected a sudden change of colour in his face the moment he looked at the newspaper. That was enough for her. "You *are* the man!" she exclaimed. "Oh, for shame, for shame! To risk your life for a paltry dispute about cards."

"I would risk it again," said Perry, "to hear you speak as if you set some value on it."

She looked away from him quickly, without a word of reply. Her mind seemed to be busy again with its own thoughts. Did she meditate returning to the subject of the duel? Was she not satisfied with the discovery which she had just made? No such doubts as these troubled the mind of Percy Linwood. Intoxicated by the charm of her presence, emboldened by her innocent betrayal of the interest that she felt in him, he opened his whole heart to her as unreservedly as if they had known each other from the days of their childhood. There was but one excuse for him. Charlotte was his first love.

"You don't know how completely you have become

a part of my life, since we met at the ball," he went on. "That one delightful dance seemed, by some magic which I can't explain, to draw us together in a few minutes as if we had known each other for years. Oh dear! I could make such a confession of what I felt, only I am afraid of offending you by speaking too soon! Women are so dreadfully difficult to understand. How is a man to know at what time it is considerate towards them to conceal his true feelings; and at what time it is equally considerate to express his true feelings? One doesn't know whether it is a matter of days or weeks or months—there ought to be a law to settle it. Dear Miss Charlotte, when a poor fellow loves you at first sight, as he has never loved any other woman, and when he is tormented by the fear that some other man may be preferred to him, can't you forgive him if he lets out the truth a little too soon?" He ventured, as he put that very downright question, to take her hand. "It really isn't my fault," he said, simply. "My heart is so full of you, I can talk of nothing else."

To Percy's surprise, the first experimental pressure of his hand, far from being resented, was suddenly returned. Charlotte looked at him again, with a new resolution in her face.

"I'll forgive you for talking nonsense, Mr. Linwood," she said; "and I will even permit you to come and see me again, on one condition—that you tell the whole truth about the duel. If you conceal the smallest circumstance, our acquaintance is at an end."

"Haven't I owned everything already?" Percy enquired, in great perplexity. "Did I say No, when you told me I was the man?"

"Could you say No, with that plaster on your neck?" was the ready rejoinder. "I am determined to know more than the newspaper tells me. Will you declare, on your word of honour, that Captain Bervie had nothing to do with the duel? Can you look me in the face, and say that the real cause of the quarrel was a disagreement at cards? What did you say, when you were talking with me just before I left the ball, and when a gentleman asked you to make one at the whist-table? You said, 'I don't play at cards.' Ah! You thought I had forgotten that? Don't kiss my hand! Trust me with the whole truth, or say good-bye for ever."

"Only tell me what you wish to know, Miss Charlotte," said Percy, humbly. "If you will put the questions, I will give the answers—as well as I can."

On this understanding, Percy's evidence was extracted from him as follows:

"Was it Captain Bervie who quarrelled with you?" "Yes."—"Was it about me?" "Yes."—"What did he say?" "He said I had committed an impropriety in waltzing with you."—"Why?" "Because your parents disapproved of your waltzing in a public ball-room."—"That's not true! What did he say next?" "He said I had added tenfold to my offence, by waltzing with you in such a manner as to make you the subject of remark to the whole room."—"Oh! did you let him say that?" "No; I contradicted him instantly. And I said, besides, 'It's an insult to Miss Bowmore to suppose that she would permit any impropriety.'"—"Quite right! And what did he say?" "Well, he lost his temper; I would rather not repeat what he said, when

he was mad with jealousy. There was nothing to be done with him but to give him his way." — "Give him his way. Does that mean fight a duel with him?" "Yes." — "And you kept my name out of it, by pretending to quarrel at the card-table?" Yes. We managed it when the card-room was emptying at supper-time, and nobody was present but Major Much and another friend as witnesses." — "And when did you fight the duel?" "The next morning." — "You never thought of *me*, I suppose?" "Indeed, I did; I was very glad that you had no suspicion of what we were at." — "Was that all?" "No; I had your flower with me, the flower you gave me out of your nosegay, at the ball." — "Well?" "Oh, never mind, it doesn't matter."—"It does matter. What did you do with my flower?" "I gave it a sly kiss while they were measuring the ground; and (don't tell anybody!) I put it next to my heart to bring me luck." — "Was that just before he shot at you?"— "Yes." — "How did he shoot?" "He walked (as the seconds had arranged it) ten paces forward; and then he stopped, and lifted his pistol——" — "Don't tell me any more! Oh, to think of my being the miserable cause of such horrors! I'll never dance again as long as I live. Did you think he had killed you, when the bullet wounded your poor neck?" "No; I hardly felt it at first." — "Hardly felt it? How he talks! And when the wretch had done his best to kill you, and when it came to your turn, what did you do?" "Nothing." — "What! You didn't walk your ten paces forward?" "No." — "And you never shot at him in return?" "No; I had no quarrel with him, poor fellow; I just stood where I was, and fired in the air——"

The next words died away on his lips. Before he

could stop her, Charlotte seized his hand, and kissed it with an hysterical fervour of admiration, which completely deprived him of his presence of mind.

"Why shouldn't I kiss the hand of a hero?" she cried, with tears of enthusiasm sparkling in her eyes. "Nobody but a hero would have given him his life; nobody but a hero would have pardoned him, while the blood was streaming from the wound that he had inflicted. I respect you, I admire you. Oh, don't think me bold!" she exclaimed, suddenly hiding her face in her hands. "I can't control myself when I hear of anything noble and good. You will make allowance for my being a strange girl? You will understand me better when we get to be old friends."

She spoke in low, sweet tones of entreaty. Percy's arm stole softly round her waist.

"Are we never to be nearer and dearer to each other than old friends?" he asked in a whisper. "I am not a hero—your goodness overrates me, dear Miss Charlotte. My one ambition is to be the happy man who is worthy enough to win *you*. At your own time! I wouldn't distress you, I wouldn't confuse you, I wouldn't for the whole world take advantage of the compliment which your sympathy has paid to me. If it offends you, I won't even ask if I may hope."

She sighed as he said the last words; trembled a little, and then silently looked at him. Percy read his answer in her eyes. Without meaning it on either side, their heads drew nearer together; their cheeks, then their lips, touched. She started back from him, and rose to leave the conservatory. At the same moment the sound of slowly-approaching footsteps be-

came audible on the gravel walk of the garden. Charlotte hurried to the door. "It is my father," she said, turning to Percy. "Come, and be introduced to him."

Percy followed her into the garden.

Charlotte had inherited all that was most striking in her personal appearance from her mother. So far as the question of stature was concerned, her father was no taller than Major Much. Judging by appearances, Mr. Bowmore looked like a man prematurely wasted and worn by the cares of a troubled life. His eyes presented the one feature in which his daughter resembled him. In shape and colour they were exactly reproduced in Charlotte; the difference was in the expression. The father's look was habitually restless, eager, and suspicious: not a trace was to be seen in it of the truthfulness and gentleness which made the charm of the daughter's expression. A man whose bitter experience of the world had soured his temper and shaken his faith in his fellow-creatures—such was Mr. Bowmore as he presented himself on the surface. Whatever compensating virtues he might possess lay hidden deep in his nature, and were only discoverable by those who knew him in the closest relations of daily life.

He received Percy politely, but with a preoccupied air. Every now and then, his restless eyes wandered from his visitor to an open letter which he had in his hand. Charlotte, observing him, pointed to the letter. "Have you any bad news there, papa?" she asked.

"Dreadful news!" Mr. Bowmore answered. "Dreadful news, my child, to every Englishman who respects the liberties which his ancestors won. My corre-

spondent is a man who is in the confidence of the Ministers," he continued, addressing Percy. "What do you think, sir, is the remedy that the Government proposes for the universal distress among the population, caused by an infamous and needless war? We are now at the 17th of February. In a week's time (I have it on the authority of my correspondent) ministers will bring in a bill for suspending the Habeas Corpus Act!" He struck the letter with his open hand; his eyes brightened with indignation as they rested on Percy's face. "I don't know what your politics may be, sir. As an English citizen, you can hardly hear that the Parliament of England is about to change the free government of this country into an absolute despotism, without *some* feeling of indignation and alarm!"

Before Percy could answer, Charlotte put a question to her father, which appeared to amaze and distress him.

"What is the Habeas Corpus Act?" she asked.

"Good God!" cried Mr. Bowmore, "is it possible that a child of mine has grown up to womanhood, in ignorance of the paladium of English liberty? Oh, Charlotte! Charlotte!"

"I am very sorry, papa. If you will only tell me, I will never forget it."

Mr. Bowmore reverently uncovered his head: he took his daughter by the hand, with a certain parental sternness: his voice trembled with emotion as he spoke his next words:

"The Habeas Corpus Act, my child, forbids the imprisonment of an English subject, unless that imprisonment can be justified by law. Not even the

order of the reigning monarch, not even the authority of the highest court in the country, can prevent us from appearing before the judges of the land, and summoning them to declare whether our committal to prison is legally just."

He put on his hat again. "Never forget what I have told you, Charlotte!" he said solemnly. "I would not remove my hat, sir," he continued, turning to Percy, "in the presence of the proudest autocrat that ever sat on a throne. I uncover in homage to the grand law which asserts the sacredness of human liberty. You are perhaps too young to know by experience what will happen if this infamous bill is sanctioned by Parliament. I can tell you what did happen, when the Habeas Corpus was suspended in England at the end of the last century. The friends of liberty were liable to imprisonment, and even to death on the scaffold, on warrants privately obtained by the paid spies and informers of Government, from justices who were the humble servants of the terrified Ministry of the time. The same horrors will be repeated in a few weeks more, unless the people can force Parliament to defend their liberties. Does my indignation surprise you, Mr. Linwood? Are you, in these dreadful times, a lukewarm person who takes no interest in placing a really liberal Government in power?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Bowmore," Percy interposed. "I have reasons for feeling the strongest interest in supporting a liberal Government."

"What reasons?" cried Mr. Bowmore, eagerly.

"My late father had a claim on Government," Percy answered, "for money expended in foreign service.

As his heir, I inherit the claim, which has been formally recognised by the present Ministry. My petition for a settlement (long since due) will be presented at the opening of Parliament, by friends of mine who can advocate my interests in the House of Commons."

Mr. Bowmore took Percy's hand and shook it warmly.

"In such a matter as this you cannot have too many friends to help you," he said. "I myself have some influence, as representing opinion outside the House; and I am entirely at your service. Come to-morrow, and let us talk over the details of your claim at my humble dinner-table. To-day I must attend a meeting of the Branch Hampden Club, of which I am vice-president, and to which I am bound to communicate the alarming news which my letter contains. In my little garden here," proceeded Mr. Bowmore, waving his hand over his modest property, "I am accustomed to consider the main points of my speeches at the club, in the necessary retirement. I have made some remarkable bursts of eloquence on this walk. Will you excuse me for to-day? and will you honour us with your company to-morrow?"

If Percy had not been in love, he might have felt some surprise at Mr. Bowmore's extraordinary devotion to his interests, after an acquaintance of about ten minutes' duration. As things were, the proposed meeting on the next day offered him an opportunity of seeing Charlotte again; and, on that account alone, he unhesitatingly accepted the invitation. Mr. Bowmore honoured him with another squeeze of his patriotic

hand, and withdrew to meditate new bursts of eloquence in the suggestive solitude of the garden walk.

CHAPTER VII.

The Warning.

"I HOPE you like my father?" said Charlotte, as she and Percy turned in the direction of the cottage. "He is such a great politician; we are so fond of him and so proud of him! All our friends say he ought to be in Parliament. He has tried twice. The expenses were dreadful; and each time the other man defeated him. The agent says he would be certainly elected if he tried again; but there is no money, and we mustn't think of it."

A man of a suspicious turn of mind might have discovered in those artless words the secret of Mr. Bowmore's interest in the success of his young friend's claim on the Government. One British subject, with a sum of ready money at his command, may be an inestimably useful person to another British subject (without ready money) who cannot sit comfortably unless he sits in Parliament! But honest Percy Linwood was not a man of a suspicious turn of mind. He only echoed Charlotte's filial glorification of her father; and Charlotte rewarded him by a smile and a look.

Just as they reached the garden entrance to the cottage, a shabbily-dressed man-servant met them with a message, for which they were both alike unprepared. "Captain Bervie has called, miss, to say good-bye, and my mistress requests your company in the parlour."

Having delivered his little formula of words, the man cast a look of furtive curiosity at Percy and withdrew. Charlotte turned to her lover, with indignation sparkling in her eyes and flushing on her cheeks at the bare idea of seeing Captain Bervie again. "The wretch!" she exclaimed. "Does he think I will breathe the same air with the man who attempted to take your life?"

Percy checked the flow of her anger by taking her hand, and looking at her gravely.

"You are sadly mistaken," he said; "and I am glad of the opportunity of setting you right. Captain Bervie stood to receive my fire as fairly as I stood to receive his. When I discharged my pistol in the air, he was the first man who ran up to me, and asked if I was seriously hurt. They told him my wound was a trifle; and he fell on his knees and thanked God for preserving my life from 'his guilty and miserable hand.' I myself saw the tears streaming down his cheeks. He said to me, 'You have shown me my vile temper as I have never seen it yet. I will get the better of it—I will go away somewhere by myself, and not return until my mind is purified from every feeling of hatred and jealousy towards the man who has forgiven me and spared my life.' He was not content with only making that promise—he held out his hand to me. 'I am no longer the rival who hates you,' he said. 'Give me a little time; and I will be *your* brother, and *her* brother. Am I worthy to take your hand?' We shook hands—we were friends. Whatever his faults may be, Charlotte, Arthur Bervie has a great heart. Go in, I entreat you, and be friends with him as I am."

Charlotte listened with downcast eyes and chang-

ing colour. "You believe him?" she asked, in low, trembling tones.

"I believe him as I believe you," Percy answered.

She secretly resented the comparison, she detested the captain more heartily than ever. "I will go in and see him, if you wish it," she said, with a sad submission in her voice. "But not by myself. I want you to come with me."

"Why?" Percy asked.

"I want to see his face, when you and he meet."

"Do you still doubt him, Charlotte?"

She looked up suddenly and made this strange reply: "*Your* mind sees him, penitent, on his knees. *My* mind sees him, pointing his pistol to take your life."

They went together into the cottage. Fixing her eyes steadily on the captain's face, Charlotte saw it turn deadly pale when Percy followed her into the parlour. The two men greeted one another cordially. Charlotte sat down by her mother, preserving her composure so far as appearances went. "I hear you have called to bid us good-bye," she said to Bervie. "Is it to be a long absence?"

"I have got two months' leave," the captain answered, without looking at her while he spoke.

"Are you going abroad?"

"Yes. I think so."

A pause followed that reply. Percy claimed the captain's attention by speaking to him next. Charlotte seized the opportunity of saying a word privately to her mother. "Don't encourage Captain Bervie to prolong his visit," she whispered; "I like him less than ever."

Mrs. Bowmore, born and bred in the exercise of that patient politeness which has long since been reckoned among obsolete social accomplishments, was shocked at her daughter's inhospitable suggestion. In the confusion of the moment, the good lady actually interrupted Captain Bervie's conversation with his friend by offering him a cup of tea! He rose as he thanked her; and made the customary apologies for not prolonging his visit. To Charlotte's surprise, Percy also rose to go. "His carriage," he said, "was waiting at the door; and he had offered to take Captain Bervie back to London." Charlotte instantly suspected an arrangement between the two men for a confidential interview. Her obstinate distrust of Bervie strengthened tenfold. She reluctantly gave him her hand, as he parted from her at the parlour door. The effort of concealing her true feeling towards him, gave a colour and a vivacity to her face which made her irresistibly beautiful. Bervie looked at her with an immeasurable sadness in his eyes. "When we meet again," he said, "you will see me in a new character." He hurried out to the gate, without waiting to be answered, as if he feared to trust himself for a moment longer in her presence.

Percy took his leave next. Charlotte followed him into the passage. "I shall be here to-morrow, dearest!" he said, and tried to raise her hand to his lips. She abruptly drew it away. "Not that hand!" she answered. "Captain Bervie has just touched it. Kiss the other!"

"Do you still doubt the captain?" said Percy, amused by her petulance.

She put her arm over his shoulder, and touched

the plaster on his neck gently with her finger. "I don't doubt," she said, "the captain did *that!*"

Percy left her, laughing. He was too happy to remonstrate seriously with her at that moment. At the front gate of the cottage he found Arthur Bervie in conversation with the same shabbily-dressed man-servant who had announced the captain's visit to Charlotte.

"What has become of the other servant?" Bervie asked. "I mean the old man who has been with Mr. Bowmore for so many years."

"He has left his situation, sir."

"Why?"

"As I understand, sir, he spoke disrespectfully to the master."

"Oh! And how came the master to hear of *you?*"

"I advertised; and Mr. Bowmore answered my advertisement."

Bervie looked hard at the man for a moment, and then joined Percy at the carriage door. The two gentlemen started for London.

"Did you notice Mr. Bowmore's new servant?" asked the captain, as they drove away from the cottage. "I don't like the look of the fellow."

"I didn't particularly notice him," Percy answered.

There was a pause. When the conversation was resumed, it turned on common-place subjects. The captain looked uneasily out of the carriage window. Percy looked uneasily at the captain.

They had left Dartford about two miles behind them, when Percy noticed an old gabled house, sheltered by magnificent trees, and standing on an eminence well

removed from the high road. Carriages and saddle-horses were visible on the drive in front, and a flag was hoisted on a staff placed in the middle of the lawn.

"Something seems to be going on there," Percy remarked. "What a fine old house! Who does it belong to?"

Bervie smiled. "It belongs to my father," he said, simply. "He is chairman of the bench of local magistrates, and he receives his brother-justices to-day, to celebrate the opening of the sessions." He stopped, and looked at Percy with a certain embarrassment. "I am afraid I have surprised and disappointed you," he resumed, abruptly changing the subject. "I told you when we met just now at Mr. Bowmore's that I had something important to say to you; and I have not yet said it. The truth is, I don't feel sure, on reflection, whether I have been long enough your friend to take the liberty of advising you."

"You mean kindly towards me," Percy answered in his frank, hearty way. "Trust me, whatever your advice is, to take it kindly on my side."

Thus encouraged, the captain spoke out.

"You told me that you had been introduced to Mr. Bowmore to-day," he began; "and you said that he took a great interest in the success of your claim on the Government. You will probably pass much of your time at the cottage, and you will be thrown a great deal into Mr. Bowmore's society. I have known him for many years. Speaking from that knowledge, I most seriously warn you against him as a thoroughly unprincipled and thoroughly dangerous man. Without entering into the question of his politics, I can tell you

that the motive of everything he says and does is vanity—inordinate, devouring vanity. To the gratification of that one passion he would sacrifice you or me, his wife or his daughter, without hesitation and without remorse. His one desire is to get into Parliament. You are a wealthy man, and you can help him. He will leave no effort untried to make you help him; and if he gets you into political difficulties, he will desert you without scruple. I see I astonish and shock you. If you think me prejudiced, write to my father, who has official knowledge of the perilous position in which this man stands. I will forward your letter, and vouch for you as a gentleman who will respect any confidence placed in him. My father will confirm me, when I tell you that this Bowmore belongs to some of the most revolutionary clubs in England; that he has spoken rank sedition at public meetings; and that his name is already in the black book at the Home Office. If the rumour be true that Ministers, in fear of insurrectionary risings among the population, are about to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act, Mr. Bowmore will certainly be in danger; and it may be my father's duty to grant the warrant that apprehends him. In your own best interests, decline resolutely to join him in any political conversation; refuse to accept his assistance in the matter of your claim on Parliament; and, above all things, stop him at the outset, when he tries to steal his way into your intimacy. I need not caution you to say nothing against him to his wife and daughter. They are infatuated about him; his wily tongue has long since deluded them. Don't let it delude *you!* If you were my brother, I could give you no sounder or better advice than this. Reflect on what I have said,

at your leisure; and let us turn in the meantime to a more interesting subject. Have you thought any more of our evening at Doctor Lagarde's?"

"I hardly know," said Percy, still under the impression of the formidable warning which he had just received. "You have given me far more serious things to think of than mesmerism."

"Let me jog your memory," the other continued. "You went on with the consultation by yourself, after I had left the doctor's house. It will be really doing me a favour, if you can call to mind what Lagarde saw in the trance, in my absence?"

Thus entreated, Percy roused himself. So long as he abstained from attempting to express them in writing, his recollections were perfectly ready to answer any reasonable call on them. He repeated in substance the doctor's description of the first of the two visions that had appeared to him after the captain's departure.

Bervie started. "A cottage parlour?" he repeated. "We have just left a cottage parlour! A man like me, trying to persuade a woman like——," he checked himself, as if he was afraid to let Charlotte's name pass his lips. "Trying to induce a woman to go away with me," he resumed, "and persuading her at last, in spite of her tears? Pray go on! What did the doctor see next?"

"He saw a travelling-carriage," Percy replied. "The lady was one of the persons in it. And there was a man with her. And there was something else—only the doctor couldn't see it."

"Could he tell you who the man was?"

"No. He was too much exhausted, he said, to see any more."

"Surely you returned to consult him again?"

"No. I had had enough of it."

"When we get to London," said the captain, "we shall pass along the Strand, on the way to your chambers. Will you kindly drop me at the turning that leads to the doctor's?"

Percy looked at him in amazement. "You still take it seriously?" he said.

"Is it *not* serious?" Bervie asked warmly. "Have you and I, so far, not done exactly what this man saw us doing? Have I not shed bitter tears of disappointment; and who was the cause of them but the woman whom he saw by my side? Did we not meet, in the days when we were rivals (as he saw us meet), with the pistols in our hands? Did you not recognise his description of the lady, when you met her at the ball, as I recognised it before you?"

"Mere coincidences!" Percy answered, quoting Charlotte's opinion when they had spoken together of Doctor Lagarde, but taking care not to cite his authority. "How many thousand men have been crossed in love? How many thousand men have fought duels for love? How many thousand women choose blue for their favourite colour, and answer to the vague description of the lady whom the doctor pretended to see?"

"Say that it is so," Bervie rejoined. "The thing is remarkable, even from your point of view. And if

more coincidences follow, the result will be more remarkable still."

The next coincidence, if it happened, would realise the love-scene with the ring. Was there anything remarkable—was it even worth calling a coincidence—if Percy put an engagement-ring on the finger of the woman who loved him, and if he kissed her afterwards? He considerately forbore, in this case, from communicating his thoughts to Bervie. "The thing that most surprised *me* in the doctor's performance," he said, "was his thinking with our thoughts, and finding out our own knowledge of our own names."

The captain shook his head. "A mere question of nervous sympathy and nervous insight," he answered. "Doctors meet with similar cases in cataleptic patients. I have seen them recorded in medical books."

Percy declined to follow his friend into the mysteries of medical literature. Arrived at the Strand, he set Bervie down at the turning which led to the doctor's lodgings. "You will call on me or write me word, if anything remarkable happens," he said.

"You shall hear from me without fail," Bervie replied.

That night, the captain's pen performed the captain's promise, in few and startling words:

"Melancholy news! Madame Lagarde is dead. Nothing is known of her son but that he has left England. If he has ventured back to France, it is barely possible that I may hear something of him. I have friends at the English embassy in Paris who will help me to make enquiries; and I start for the Continent to-morrow. Write to me while I am away, to the care

of my father, at 'The Manor House, near Dartford.' He will always know my address abroad, and will forward your letters. For your own sake, remember the warning I gave you this afternoon! Your faithful friend, A. B."

CHAPTER VIII.

Official Secrets.

FROM PETER WEEMS TO JOHN JENNET, ESQ.,
Secret Service Department, Home Office.
Private and Confidential.*

The Cottage, Dartford,
February 24th, 1817.

SIR,—I beg to inform you that there is no fear of my being compelled to leave my situation as servant in Mr. Bowmore's house, before I have completed the private investigations committed to my charge. The attempt made by Mrs. Bowmore and her daughter to have the old servant forgiven and taken back again has failed. He presumed, it seems, on his long and faithful service to warn the master that his political opinions might get him into trouble. Mr. Bowmore positively refuses to forgive the liberty that his servant has taken with him. I am accordingly left in possession of the footman's place; and not the slightest suspicion is felt of my true errand in the house.

My note-book contains nothing relating to the past

* Persons desirous of consulting the author's authority for passages which relate to the social and political condition of England at the date of the story, are referred to the Annual Register for the year 1817. In Chapters I. and II. they will find the Reports of the Secret Committees and the Debates in Parliament, which led to the supension of the Habeas Corpus Act. Further on, at page 66, they will also find the employment of paid spies and informers by the English Government, openly acknowledged in the House of Lords, and openly defended in the speeches of Lord Redesdale and Lord Liverpool.

week, mainly in consequence of the visits here of one Mr. Percy Linwood, which have a little disturbed the domestic routine. This gentleman's avowed object is to pay his court to Miss Bowmore. Whether he is, politically speaking, a person of any importance, I have yet to discover. Judging by appearances, though perfectly respectful to Mr. Bowmore, he is not particularly desirous of cultivating the society of his future father-in-law. Mr. Bowmore perceives this, and resents it. He has turned sulky, and for once he keeps his thoughts to himself. There was a family discussion on the subject of Mr. Linwood the other day, which is of no official interest so far. If it leads to anything, I will not fail to send you the necessary particulars.

March 3rd.—The family discussion *has* led to something.

At Mr. Linwood's next visit, the young lady (Miss Charlotte) had a long talk with him on the subject of his behaviour to her father. They usually meet in the conservatory; I have broken a pane of glass at the back, and I can hear everything they say. The lady accused her lover of being set against her father by some slanderer. As her anger rose, she did not scruple to guess at the slanderer's name. She mentioned no less a person than Captain Bervie, son of Justice Bervie, of the Manor House. Mr. Linwood's defence was but a poor one; he could only declare that she was mistaken. She refused to believe this, and it ended in her giving him his dismissal, in these plain words: "You distrust my father, and you refuse to admit me into your confidence—you needn't trouble yourself to call here again."

The usual consequences followed upon this. Mr. Linwood is too fond of his young lady to resist her and lose her. He accepted any terms she chose to impose on him as the price of being restored to her favour. Half an hour later, he was walking with Mr. Bowmore in the garden, and was asking leave to consult him about a claim on Parliament for moneys due to his father's estate. Circumstances allowed me no opportunity of listening safely to what passed at the interview. I can only report, as one result of the conversation, that Mr. Linwood accompanied Mr. Bowmore, the same evening, to a meeting of the local Hampden Club. I suppose he had his reward the next day, by being permitted to put a ring on Miss Charlotte's finger in the garden, and to kiss her afterwards to his heart's content! For what took place at the club, I refer you to the special agent who attends there, in the character of one of the members.

March 10th.—Nothing to report, except the growing intimacy between Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood, and another visit of the two to the Hampden Club. Also the happy progress of the young gentleman's love affair. I only mention this latter trifle by way of necessary reference to Miss Charlotte. She has met old Justice Bervie out riding, and has heard from him of the unexpected return of his son the captain from foreign parts. From what I could pick up of the conversation at dinner, I gather that the justice has been informed of Mr. Linwood's visits to the revolutionary club; that he wrote word of it to his son; and that the captain has returned to set his influence over Mr. Linwood against Mr. Bowmore's influence—if he can. Miss

Charlotte is furious at the bare idea of his interference. Poor soul! she honestly believes her father to be the greatest statesman in England. See what it is to be *too* dutiful a daughter!

March 17th.—Being occupied with matters of serious importance, you may not have noticed that Mr. Linwood's claim has been brought before the House of Commons, and has been adjourned for further consideration in six months' time. When the country is threatened with a revolution, Parliament has something better to do than to trouble itself about private claims. It was simply absurd to bring such a matter forward at all.

This, however, is not the view taken by Mr. Linwood and Mr. Bowmore. They are both indignant—especially Mr. Bowmore. He has decided to call a special meeting of the Hampden Club to consider his friend's wrongs; and he has persuaded Mr. Linwood to have his name put down as a candidate for election into the society. Captain Bervie has attempted to interfere, personally, and by writing, and has been repelled. Not Miss Charlotte only, but even that peaceable lady her mother is shocked at the captain's implied distrust of Mr. Bowmore and the club. Mr. Linwood has informed the captain that he will neither hear nor read one word from him in disparagement of Mr. Bowmore. Miss Charlotte is not ungrateful for this proof of confidence in her father. The gossip among the women in the kitchen informs me that she has consented to appoint the wedding-day.

March 26th.—A longer time than usual has elapsed since the date of my last report.

On reflection, I thought it best to decide our doubt, whether Mr. Bowmore is or is not the secret agent in England of a club of French Republicans, by writing myself to the fountain-head of information in Paris. As you wisely observe, the man himself is a vain fool, who can only give us any serious trouble as an instrument in the hands of others. No such complication as this need be apprehended. After waiting some days for my answer from Paris, I have ascertained that Mr. Bowmore did offer his services to the French club, but that the offer was declined with thanks. Either the Frenchmen made enquiries, or Mr. Bowmore's true character was known to them when they received his proposal.

Nothing now remains to be decided, but the other question of stopping this man's flow of frothy eloquence (which undeniably has its influence on some thousands of ignorant people) by putting him in prison. If I rightly understand your last instructions, the main reason for delay is connected with the present position of Mr. Linwood. Has he, too, spoken or written seditiously of the Government? And is it desirable to include him in the arrest of Mr. Bowmore?

By way of replying to this, I enclose the shorthand notes of my colleague, charged with reporting the proceedings of the Hampden Club.

The note numbered One contains Mr. Linwood's speech at the debate, on the question of forcing his claim upon the attention of the Government. Judged as oratory, it is wretched stuff. Judged as sedition, it rivals the more elaborate efforts of Mr. Bowmore himself.

The note numbered Two reports the proceedings at a special sitting of the club this morning. The subject of debate is the recent decision of Parliament, suspending the Habeas Corpus Act at the pleasure of the Government. You will see that a public meeting, in "aid of British liberty," is to be summoned in a field near Dartford, on the 2nd of April; that the London societies are to receive the Committee of the Hampden Club on the next day; that they are to escort Mr. Bowmore to Westminster Hall, and to insist on his being heard at the bar of the House of Commons. You will also perceive that the person who seconds the final resolution submitted to the club—which declares that Parliament must be intimidated, if Parliament can be reached in no other way—is Mr. Percy Linwood himself.

I have further ascertained that Miss Charlotte was present among "the ladies in the gallery," who were permitted to attend the debate, and that she is to be married to Mr. Linwood on the 7th of April next. These circumstances sufficiently account, to my mind, for the extraordinary imprudence of which Mr. Linwood has been guilty. Mr. Bowmore declares that the "minions of Government dare not touch a hair of his head." Miss Charlotte believes Mr. Bowmore. And Mr. Linwood believes Miss Charlotte.

These particulars being communicated, I have now the honour to wait your final instructions.

March 31st.—Your commands reached me yeste day at noon.

Two hours afterwards I obtained leave of absenc and waited privately on Justice Bervie. I had r

wig and my other materials for disguise in the pockets of my greatcoat; and I found, in a deserted stone quarry, an excellent dressing-room for the needful changes, before I visited the justice, and before I returned to my footman's place.

Arrived at Squire Bervie's, I sent in your confidential letter, and had an interview with the justice, at which I laid my information in due form. On my asking next for warrants to arrest Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood, the justice retired to consider my application. But for your letter, I strongly suspect he would himself have applied to the Home Secretary before granting the warrant against Mr. Linwood. As things were, he had no choice but to do his duty; and even then he did it with a reservation, in the shape of a delay. He declined, on purely formal grounds, to date the warrants earlier than the 2nd of April. I represented that the public assemblage in the field was to take place on that day, and that the arrest of Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood a day or two earlier might prevent the meeting, by depriving it of its leaders. The justice's reply to this was not very polite: "I am acting in the exercise of my own discretion, sir. Good morning."

On leaving the house, I noticed three persons in a corner of the hall, who appeared to be interested in watching my departure. Two of them I recognised as Captain Bervie and Major Much, both friends of Mr. Linwood. The third was a lady, whom I have since ascertained to be the captain's sister. That the two gentlemen are interested in steering Mr. Linwood clear of political difficulties, I have no sort of doubt. As to Miss Bervie, I can only say that she was certainly

in the company of the major and the captain, and to all appearance in their confidence also.

To-morrow evening (April 1st) there is to be a special session of the club, to make the final arrangements for the management of the public meeting on the 2nd. If my warrants had been dated on the 1st, I might quietly arrest Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood on their return from the club; and the news would be spread in time to prevent the meeting. Under existing circumstances (unless I receive orders from you), I must decide for myself whether I make the arrest before the meeting or after.

In any case, you may rely on the affair being managed (as the Government wish it to be managed) with the strictest secrecy. Your letter to Justice Bervie, containing the Home Secretary's instructions to let no person about him—not even his clerk—know of my application for the warrants, evidently startled the old gentleman. If he ventures to take any living creature into his confidence—and if I discover it—the consequence will be his dismissal from the bench of magistrates. I believe he will hold his tongue. He is sharp enough to understand that Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood (who might otherwise be exhibited as martyrs in the Radical newspapers) are simply to disappear. What an invaluable aid to Government is the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act! Forgive my indulging in political reflection—I am in such high spirits at the approaching termination of my labours. At the same time, I pity Miss Charlotte. She is so happy, and so entirely unsuspicious of any misfortune hanging over her head.

It is certainly hard to have her lover clapped into prison just before the wedding-day!

I will bring you word of the arrest myself; there will be plenty of time for me to catch the afternoon coach to London. Between this date and the 2nd, rely on my keeping a watchful eye on both the gentlemen; and on Mr. Bowmore especially. He is just the man, if he feels the faintest suspicion that he is in any danger, to provide for his own means of escape, and to leave Mr. Linwood to shift for himself. I have the honour to be, sir, your obedient humble servant,

PETER WEEMS.

CHAPTER IX.

The Elopement.

On the evening of the 1st of April, Mrs. Bowmore was left alone with the servants. Mr. Bowmore and Percy had gone out together to attend the special meeting of the club. Shortly afterwards Miss Charlotte had left the cottage, under very extraordinary circumstances.

A few minutes only after the departure of her father and Percy, she received a letter, which appeared to cause her the most violent agitation. She said to Mrs. Bowmore: "Mamma, I must see Captain Bervie for a few minutes in private, on a matter of serious importance to all of us. He is waiting at the front gate, and he will come in if I show myself at the hall door." Upon this, Mrs. Bowmore had asked for an explanation. "There is no time for explanation" was the only answer she received; "I ask you to leave me for five minutes alone with the captain." Mrs. Bowmore, naturally enough, still hesitated. Charlotte snatched up her garden-hat, and declared wildly that she would go out to Captain Bervie, if she was not permitted to receive him at home. In the face of this declaration, Mrs. Bowmore yielded, and left the room.

In a minute more the captain was in the cottage

parlour. Although she had given way to her daughter, Mrs. Bowmore was not disposed to trust her, without supervision, in the society of a man whom Charlotte herself had reviled as a slanderer and a false friend. She took up her position in the verandah outside the parlour, at a safe distance from one of the two windows of the room, which had been left partially open to admit the fresh air. Here she waited and listened.

The conversation was for some time carried on in whispers. As they became more and more excited, both Charlotte and Bervie ended in unconsciously raising their voices. "I swear it to you on my faith as a Christian!" Mrs. Bowmore heard the captain say. "I declare before God who hears me that I am speaking the truth!" And Charlotte had answered, with a burst of tears, "I can't believe you! I daren't believe you! Oh, how can you ask me to do such a thing? Let me go! let me go!" Alarmed at those words, Mrs. Bowmore advanced to the window, and looked in. Bervie had put Charlotte's arm in his arm, and was trying to induce her to leave the parlour with him. She resisted and implored him to release her. Mrs. Bowmore was on the point of entering the room to interfere—when Bervie suddenly dropped Charlotte's arm, and whispered in her ear. She started as she heard the words, looked at him keenly, and instantly made up her mind. "Let me tell my mother where I am going," she said; "and I will consent." "Be it so!" he answered, and hurried her out.

Mrs. Bowmore re-entered the cottage by the adjoining room, and met them in the passage. "Remember one thing," Bervie said, before Charlotte

could speak. "Every minute is precious; the fewest words are the best."

In few words, Charlotte spoke. "I must go at once to Justice Bervie's house. Don't be afraid, mamma! I know what I am about, and I know that I am right."

"Going to Justice Bervie's!" cried Mrs. Bowmore, in the utmost extremity of astonishment. "What will your father say, what will Percy think, when they come back from the club?"

"My sister's carriage is waiting for me close by," Bervie answered. "It is entirely at Miss Charlotte's disposal. She can easily get back if she wishes to keep her visit a secret, before Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood return."

He led the way to the door as he spoke. Charlotte kissed her mother tenderly, and followed him. Mrs. Bowmore called to them to wait. "I daren't let you go," she said to her daughter, "without your father's leave!" Charlotte seemed not to hear, the captain seemed not to hear. They ran across the front garden, and through the gate—and were out of sight in less than a minute.

More than two hours had passed; the sun had sunk below the horizon, and still there were no signs of Charlotte's return.

Feeling seriously uneasy, Mrs. Bowmore crossed the room to ring the bell, and send the man-servant to Justice Bervie's house to hasten her daughter's return. As she approached the fireplace, she was startled by a sound of stealthy footsteps in the hall, followed by a loud noise as of some heavy object that had dropped on the floor. She rang the bell violently, and

then hurried to the door of the parlour. As she opened it, the footman passed her, running out, apparently in pursuit of somebody, at the top of his speed. She followed him as rapidly as she could, out of the cottage, and across the little front garden, to the gate. Arrived in the road, she was just in time to see him vault upon the luggage-board at the back of a post-chaise, which had apparently passed the cottage, and drawn up a little beyond it. Peter gained the board, just as the postillion started the horses on the way to London. He saw Mrs. Bowmore looking at him, before the carriage had greatly increased its distance from the cottage, and pointed, with an insolent nod of his head, first to the inside of the vehicle, and then over it to the high road; signing to her that he designed to accompany the person in the post-chaise to the end of the journey.

Turning to go back to the cottage, Mrs. Bowmore saw her own bewilderment reflected in the faces of the two female servants, who had followed her out.

"Who can Peter be after, Ma'am?" asked the cook. "Do you think it's a thief?"

The housemaid pointed to the post-chaise, barely visible in the distance. "Simpleton!" she said. "Do thieves travel in that way? I wish my master had come back," she proceeded, speaking to herself, "I'm afraid there's something wrong."

Mrs. Bowmore, returning through the garden-gate, instantly stopped and looked at the woman.

"What makes you mention your master's name, Amelia, when you fear that something is wrong?" she asked.

Amelia changed colour, and looked confused.

"I am loath to alarm you, Ma'am," she said; "and I can't rightly see what it is my duty to do."

Mrs. Bowmore's heart sank within her under the cruellest of all terrors—the terror of something unknown. "Don't keep me in suspense," she said faintly. "Whatever it is, let me know it."

She led the way back to the parlour. The housemaid followed her. The cook (declining to be left alone) followed the housemaid.

"It was something I heard this afternoon, Ma'am," Amelia began. "Cook happened to be busy——"

The cook interposed: she had not forgiven the housemaid for calling her a simpleton. "No, Amelia! If you *must* bring me into it—not busy. Uneasy in my mind on the subject of the soup."

"I don't know that your mind makes much difference," Amelia proceeded. "What it comes to is this—it was I, and not you, who went into the kitchen-garden for the vegetables."

"Not by *my* wish, Heaven knows!" persisted the cook.

"Leave the room!" said Mrs. Bowmore. Even her patience had given way at last.

The cook looked as if she declined to believe her own ears. Mrs. Bowmore pointed to the door. The cook said "Oh?"—accenting it as a question. Mrs. Bowmore's finger still pointed. The cook, in solemn silence, yielded to circumstances, and banged the door.

"I was getting the vegetables, Ma'am," Amelia resumed, "when I heard voices on the other side of the paling. The wood is so old that one can see through the cracks easy enough. I saw my master and Mr.

Linwood, and Captain Bervie. The captain seemed to have stopped the other two on the pathway that leads to the field; he stood, as it might be, between them and the back way to the house—and he spoke severely, that he did! 'For the last time, Mr. Bowmore,' says he, 'will you understand that you are in danger, and that Mr. Linwood is in danger, unless you both leave this neighbourhood to-night?' My master made light of it. 'For the last time,' says he, 'will you refer us to a proof of what you say, and allow us to judge for ourselves?' 'I have told you already,' says the captain, 'I am bound by my duty towards another person to keep what I know a secret.' 'Very well,' says my master, '*I* am bound by my duty to my country. And I tell you this,' says he, in his high and mighty way, 'neither Government, nor the spies of Government, dare touch a hair of my head: they know it, sir, for the head of the people's friend!' The captain lost his temper. 'What stuff!' says he; 'there's a Government spy in your house at this moment, disguised as your footman.' My master looked at Mr. Linwood, and burst out laughing. 'Peter a spy!' says he; 'poor Peter! You won't beat that, captain, if you talk till doomsday.' He turned about without a word more, and went home. The captain caught Mr. Linwood by the arm, as soon as they were alone. 'For God's sake,' says he, 'don't follow that madman's example! If you value your liberty, if you hope to become Charlotte's husband, consult your own safety. I can give you a passport. Escape to France and wait till this trouble is over.' Mr. Linwood was not in the best of tempers —Mr. Linwood shook him off. 'Charlotte's father will soon be my father,' says he; 'do you think I will desert

him? My friends at the club have taken up my claim; do you think I will forsake them at the meeting to-morrow? You ask me to be unworthy of Charlotte, and unworthy of my friends—you insult me, if you say more.' He whipped round on his heel, and followed my master. The captain lifted his hands to the heavens, and looked—I declare it turned my blood, Ma'am, to see him. If there's truth in mortal man, it's my firm belief——"

What the housemaid's belief was, remained unexpressed. Before she could get to her next word, a shriek of horror from the hall announced that the cook's powers of interruption were not exhausted yet.

Mistress and servant both hurried out, in terror of they knew not what. There stood the cook, alone in the hall, confronting the stand on which the overcoats and hats of the men of the family were placed. "Where's the master's travelling-coat?" cried the cook, staring wildly at an unoccupied peg. "And where's his cap to match? Oh Lord, he's off in the post-chaise! and Peter's after him!"

Simpleton as she was, the woman (loitering about the hall) had blundered on a very serious discovery. Coat and cap—both made after a foreign pattern, and both strikingly remarkable in form and colour to English eyes—had unquestionably disappeared. It was equally certain that they were well known to Peter, as the coat and cap which his master used in travelling. Had Mr. Bowmore discovered that he was really in danger? Had the necessities of instant flight only allowed him time enough to snatch his coat and cap out of the hall? And had Peter seen him as he was making his escape to the post-chaise? The cook's conclusion an-

swered all these questions in the affirmative; and, if Captain Bervie's words of warning were to be believed, the cook's conclusion for once was not to be despised.

Under this last trial of her fortitude, Mrs. Bowmore's feeble reserves of endurance completely gave way. The poor lady turned faint and giddy. Amelia placed her on a chair in the hall, and told the cook to open the front door and let in the fresh air. The cook obeyed; and instantly broke out with a second terrific scream; announcing nothing less, this time, than the appearance of Mr. Bowmore himself, alive and hearty, returning with Percy from the meeting at the club!

The inevitable enquiries and explanations followed. Fully assured as he had declared himself to be, of the sanctity of his person (politically speaking), Mr. Bowmore turned pale, nevertheless, when he looked at the unoccupied peg on his clothes' stand. Had some man unknown personated him? And had a post-chaise been hired to lead an impending pursuit of him in the wrong direction? What did it mean? Who was the friend to whose services he was indebted? As for the proceedings of Peter, but one interpretation could now be placed on them. They distinctly justified Captain Bervie's assertion, that the footman was a spy. Mr. Bowmore thought of the captain's other assertion, relating to the urgent necessity for making his escape; looked at Percy in silent dismay; and turned paler than ever.

Percy's thoughts, diverted for the moment only from the lady of his love, returned to her with renewed fidelity. "Let us hear what Charlotte thinks of it," he said. "Where is she?"

Another explanation followed this question. Terri-

fied at the effect which it produced on Percy, helplessly ignorant when she was called upon to account for her daughter's absence, Mrs. Bowmore could only shed tears and express a devout trust in Providence. Her husband looked at the new misfortune from a political point of view. He sat down and slapped his forehead theatrically with the palm of his hand. "Thus far," said the patriot, "my political assailants have only struck at me through the newspapers. *Now* they strike at me through my child!" Percy made no speeches. There was a look in his eyes which boded ill for the captain, if the two met. "I am going to fetch her," was all he said, "as fast as a horse can carry me."

He hired his horse at an inn in the town, and set forth for Justice Bervie's house at a gallop.

During Percy's absence, Mr. Bowmore secured the front and back entrances to the cottage with his own hands. These first precautions taken, he ascended to his room and packed his travelling-bag. "Necessaries for my use in prison," he remarked. "The bloodhounds of Government are after me." "Are they after Percy too?" his wife ventured to ask. Mr. Bowmore looked up impatiently, and cried "Pooh!"—as if Percy was of no consequence. Mrs. Bowmore thought otherwise: the good woman privately packed a bag for Percy, in the sanctuary of her own room.

For an hour, and more than an hour, no event of any sort occurred. Mr. Bowmore stalked up and down the parlour, meditating. At intervals, ideas of flight presented themselves attractively to his mind. At intervals, ideas of the speech that he had prepared for the public meeting on the next day took their place.

"If I fly to-night," he wisely observed, "what will become of my speech? I will *not* fly to-night! Let them put me in prison—the people shall hear me!"

He sat down and crossed his arms fiercely. As he looked at his wife to see what effect he had produced on her, the sound of heavy carriage-wheels and the trampling of horses penetrated to the parlour from the garden-gate. Mr. Bowmore started to his feet, with every appearance of having suddenly altered his mind on the question of flight. Just as he reached the hall, Percy's voice was heard at the front door. "Let me in. Instantly! Instantly!"

Mrs. Bowmore drew back the bolts, before the servants could help her. "Where is Charlotte?" she cried, seeing Percy alone on the door-step.

"Gone!" Percy answered furiously. "Eloped to Paris, with Captain Bervie! Read her own confession. They were just sending the messenger with it, when I reached the house."

He handed a note to Mrs. Bowmore, and turned aside to speak to her husband while she read it. Charlotte wrote to her mother very briefly:

"DEAREST MOTHER,—I have left you for a few days. Pray don't be alarmed about me, and pray don't think ill of me. Everything shall be explained on my return. I am under the most careful protection; and I have a lady for my companion on the journey. I will write again from Paris.—Your loving daughter, CHARLOTTE."

Percy took Mr. Bowmore by the arm, and pointed to a carriage and four horses waiting at the garden-gate. "Do you come with me, and back me with your

authority as her father?" he asked, briefly and sternly; "or do you leave me to go alone?"

Mr. Bowmore was famous among his admirers for his "happy replies." He made one now.

"I am not Brutus," he said. "I am only Bowmore. My daughter before everything. Fetch my travelling-bag."

While the travellers' bags were being placed in the chaise, Mr. Bowmore was struck by an idea. He produced from his coat-pocket a roll of many papers thickly covered with writing. On the blank leaf in which they were tied up, he wrote in the largest letters: "Frightful domestic calamity! Vice-President Bowmore obliged to leave England! Welfare of a beloved daughter! His speech will be read at the meeting by President Joskin, of the Club. (Private to Joskin. Have these lines printed and posted everywhere. And, for God's sake, don't drop your voice at the ends of the sentences.)"

He threw down the pen, and embraced Mrs. Bowmore in the most summary manner. The poor woman was ordered to send the roll of paper to the club, without a word to comfort and sustain her from her husband's lips. Percy spoke to her hopefully and kindly, as he kissed her cheek at parting. In another moment lover and father had started on the first stage, from Dartford to Dover.

CHAPTER X.

Pursuit and Discovery.

FEELING himself hurried away from all possible pursuit, as fast as four horses could carry him, Mr. Bowmore had leisure to criticise Percy's conduct, from his own purely selfish point of view.

"If you had listened to my advice," he said, "or, if you had only suffered yourself to be persuaded by my daughter (who inherits my unerring instincts), you would have treated that man Bervie like the hypocrite and villain that he is. But no! you trust to your own crude impressions. Having given him your hand after the duel (I would have given him the contents of my pistol!), you hesitated to withdraw it again, when that slanderer appealed to your friendship not to cast him off! Now you see the consequence!"

"Wait till we get to Paris!" All the ingenuity of Percy's travelling companion failed to extract from him any other answer than that.

Foiled so far, Mr. Bowmore began to start difficulties next. Had they money enough for the journey? Percy touched his pocket, and answered shortly, "Plenty." Had they passports? Percy sullenly showed a letter. "There is the necessary voucher from a magistrate," he said. "The consul at Dover will give us our passports. Mind this!" he added, in warning tones, "I have pledged my word of honour to Justice Bervie, that

we have no political object in view in travelling to France. Keep your politics to yourself, on the other side of the Channel."

Mr. Bowmore listened in blank amazement. Charlotte's lover was appearing in a new character—the character of a man who was actually losing his respect for Charlotte's father!

It was useless to talk to him! He deliberately checked any further attempts at conversation, by leaning back in the carriage and closing his eyes. The truth is, Mr. Bowmore's own language and conduct were insensibly producing the salutary impression on Percy's mind, which Bervie had vainly tried to convey, under the disadvantage of having Charlotte's influence against him. Throughout the journey, Percy did exactly what Bervie had once entreated him to do—he kept Mr. Bowmore at a distance.

At every stage they enquired after the fugitives. At every stage they were answered by a more or less intelligible description of Bervie and Charlotte, and of the lady who accompanied them. No disguise had been attempted; no person had in any case been bribed to conceal the truth.

When the first tumult of his emotions had in some degree subsided, this strange circumstance associated itself in Percy's mind with the equally unaccountable conduct of Justice Bervie, on his arrival at the Manor House. The old gentleman met his visitor in the hall, without expressing, and apparently without feeling, any indignation at his son's conduct. It was even useless to appeal to him for information. He only said, "I am not in Arthur's confidence; he is of age, and my daughter is of age; I have no claim to control them.

I believe they have taken Miss Bowmore to Paris; and that is all I know about it." He had shown the same dense insensibility in giving his official voucher for the passports. Percy had only to satisfy him on the question of politics; and the document was drawn out as a matter of course. Such had been the father's behaviour; and the conduct of the son now exhibited the same shameless composure. To what conclusion did this discovery point? Over and over again, Percy asked himself that question; and, over and over again, he abandoned the attempt to answer it, in despair.

They reached Dover towards two o'clock in the morning.

At the pier-head they found a coast-guardsman on duty, and more information. In 1817 the communication with France was still by sailing-vessels. Arriving long after the departure of the regular packet, Bervie had hired a lugger, and had sailed with the two ladies for Calais, having a fresh breeze in his favour. Percy's first angry impulse was to follow him instantly. The next moment he remembered the insurmountable obstacle of the passports. The consul would certainly not grant those essentially necessary documents at two in the morning! The only alternative was to wait for the regular packet, which sailed some hours later—between eight and nine o'clock in the forenoon. In this case, they might apply for their passports before the regular office hours, if they explained the circumstances, backed by the authority of the magistrate's letter.

Mr. Bowmore followed Percy to the nearest inn that was open, with sublime indifference to the delays and difficulties of the journey. He ordered refresh-

ments with the air of a man who was performing a melancholy duty to himself in the name of humanity. "When I think of my speech," he said, at supper, "my heart bleeds for the people. In a few hours more, they will assemble in their thousands, eager to hear me. And what will they see? Joskin in my place! Joskin with a manuscript in his hand! Joskin, who drops his voice at the ends of his sentences! I will never forgive Charlotte. Waiter, another glass of brandy and water."

Having succeeded in obtaining their passports, the travellers were troubled by no further difficulties. After an unusually quick passage across the Channel, they continued their journey by post as far as Amiens, and reached that city in time to take their places by the diligence to Paris.

Arriving in Paris on the 3rd of April, they encountered another incomprehensible proceeding on the part of Captain Bervie.

Among the persons assembled in the yard to see the arrival of the diligence was a man with a morsel of paper in his hand, evidently on the look-out for some person whom he expected to discover among the travellers. After consulting his bit of paper, he looked with steady attention at Percy and Mr. Bowmore, and suddenly approached them. "If you wish to see the captain," he said, in broken English, "you will find him at that hotel." He handed a printed card to Percy, and disappeared among the crowd before it was possible to question him.

Even Mr. Bowmore gave way to human weakness, and condescended to feel astonished in the face of such an event as this. "What next!" he exclaimed.

"Wait till we get to the hotel," said Percy.

In half an hour more they had got to the hotel.

Percy pushed aside the waiter, as soon as he saw the door before him, and burst into the room.

The captain was alone, sitting by the window, reading a newspaper. Before the first furious words had escaped Percy's lips, Bervie silenced him by pointing to a closed door on the right of the fireplace. "She is there," he said; "speak quietly, or you may frighten her. I know what you are going to say," he added, as Percy stepped nearer to him, determined to be heard. "Will you give me a minute to speak in my own defence, and then decide whether I am the greatest scoundrel living, or the best friend you ever had?"

He put the question earnestly and kindly, with something that was at once grave and tender in his look and manner. The extraordinary composure with which he acted and spoke had its tranquillising influence over Percy. For the moment at least, he felt himself surprised into giving Bervie a hearing.

"I will tell you first what I have done," Bervie proceeded, "and next why I did it. For reasons presently to be mentioned, I have taken it on myself, Mr. Linwood, to make an alteration in your wedding arrangements. Instead of being married at Dartford church, you will be married (if you see no objection) at the chapel of the Embassy in Paris, by my old college friend the chaplain."

This was too much for Percy's self-control. "Your audacity is beyond belief," he broke out. "Even granting that you speak the truth, how dare you interfere in my affairs without my permission?"

Bervie held up his hand for silence. "One minute's hearing isn't much to ask," he said. "Take that cane in the corner, and treat me as you would treat a dog that had bitten you, if I don't make you alter your opinion of me in one minute more by the clock!"

Percy hesitated. Mr. Bowmore seized the opportunity of making himself heard.

"This is all very well, Captain Bervie," he began. "But I, for one, object, under any circumstances, to be made the victim of a trick."

"You are the victim of your own obstinate refusal to profit by a plain warning," Bervie rejoined. "At the eleventh hour, I entreated you, and I entreated Mr. Linwood, to provide for your own safety; and I spoke in vain."

Percy's patience gave way once more. "Your minute by the clock is passing," he interposed; "and you have said nothing to justify yourself yet."

"Very well put!" Mr. Bowmore chimed in. "Come to the point, sir! My daughter's reputation is in question."

"Miss Bowmore's reputation is not in question for a single instant," Bervie answered. "My sister has been the companion of her journey from first to last."

"Journey?" Mr. Bowmore repeated indignantly. "I want to know, sir, what the journey means. As an outraged father, I ask one plain question. Why did you run away with my daughter?"

Instead of answering the "outraged father," Bervie took two slips of paper from his pocket, and handed them to Percy with a smile.

"I ran away with the bride," he said, coolly, "in the certain knowledge that you and Mr. Bowmore would run after me. If I had not forced you both to

follow me out of England on the 1st of April, you would have been made State prisoners on the 2nd. Those slips of paper are copies of the warrants which my father's duty compelled him to issue for 'the arrest of Percy Linwood and Orlando Bowmore.' I may divulge the secret *now*—warrants are waste paper here. Don't speak, Percy! the minute isn't quite at an end yet. Answer me one question, and I have done. I vowed I would be worthy of your generosity on the day when you spared my life. Have I kept my word?"

For once there was an Englishman who was not contented to express the noblest emotions that humanity can feel by the commonplace ceremony of shaking hands. Percy's heart overflowed. In an outburst of unutterable gratitude he threw himself on Bervie's breast. As brothers the two men embraced. As brothers they loved and trusted one another from that day forth.

The door on the right was softly opened from within. A charming face—the dark eyes bright with happy tears, the rosy lips just opening into a smile—peeped into the room. A low sweet voice, with an undernote of trembling in it, made this modest protest, in the form of an enquiry:

"When you have quite done with him, Percy, perhaps you will have something to say to ME?"

LAST WORDS.

I.

THE letter which Charlotte wrote to her mother, on the day of Percy's arrival in Paris, contains certain facts which may be reproduced with advantage at the close of the story.

Failing to persuade her to consent to his daring stratagem on any other terms, Bervie had taken Charlotte to his father, and had prevailed upon the justice to run the risk of trusting her with the secret of the coming arrests. Having first promised to respect the confidence placed in her, until the 2nd of April was over and past, she had no choice left on the evening of the 1st, but to let her father and her lover go to prison, or to take her place with Captain Bervie and his sister in the travelling-carriage.

The person whose daring and dexterity had drawn the spy away in the wrong direction, exactly at the time when his absence was of the utmost importance, was no other than Major Much. That old campaigner being a guest at the Manor House when Charlotte arrived, and hearing that the false footman was the one obstacle in the way of his dear Arthur's success, hit on the bright idea of personating Mr. Bowmore. They were both of the same height and build. Dressed in the patriot's travelling coat and cap, the back view of

Major Much (presented to Peter as soon as the necessary noise had brought the spy up from the kitchen to the hall) would have deceived anybody. At every stage on the way to London, the major was as careful to lie back like a sleeper, with his handkerchief over his face, as Peter was to look in at the carriage-window and make sure that his victim was inside. Arrived at his own lodgings, the old soldier rushed in under cover of the darkness, in admirable imitation of a man who was afraid to be seen. Keeping watch himself over the house, Peter sent for assistance to his superior officer, by the first unemployed man who would carry his letter. As soon as the church clocks, striking midnight, announced that the second day of April had lawfully begun, he and his assistants entered the house with their warrant, encountering no opposition on the part of the servant who opened the door. The first person whom they discovered was Major Much, smoking his pipe in his own character; and denying all knowledge of Mr. Bowmore's whereabouts, with such a judiciously-assumed appearance of confusion, that Peter and his men wasted hours in searching the house, and interrogating the inmates from the kitchen to the garrets. By the time the spy had arrived at his first suspicion that he might have been imposed upon, and had made his way back to Dartford by the morning coach, Percy and Mr. Bowmore were eating their breakfast at Dessein's Hotel in Calais.

Having relieved her mother's anxiety so far, Charlotte touched next on the subject of her marriage.

"Miss Bervie will be my bridesmaid" (she wrote), "and our dear captain will be Percy's 'best man;' and papa will 'give me away,' of course. But nothing can

be done without you. An experienced courier has received Percy's instructions to escort you to Paris. You must come here, dearest mother, not only for my sake, but for your own sake too. Neither Percy nor papa can return to England; and your being left alone at Dartford is not to be thought of. Besides, you will help to quiet papa's mind. Do what we can to pacify him, he persists in being angry with Captain Bervie. When I remind him that he would have been put into prison if the captain had not saved him, he smiles sorrowfully. 'I could have reconciled my mind to a prison,' he says. 'But what I can NOT endure is being made the victim of a trick!'"

With this domestic anecdote, and with sundry instructions relating to the packing of dresses, the letter came to an end.

A fortnight later the marriage took place. The persons immediately interested were the only persons present. At the little breakfast afterwards, Mr. Bowmore insisted on making a speech to a select audience of five—namely, the bride and bridegroom, the chaplain, the captain, and Mrs. Bowmore. But what does a small audience matter? The English frenzy for making speeches is not to be cooled by such a trifle as that. At the end of the world, the expiring forces of Nature will hear a dreadful voice—the voice of the last Englishman making the last speech. Mr. Bowmore spoke for half an hour. Subject of the discourse: How can I be most useful to my country at the present crisis? As an exile on the Continent, or as a martyr in prison? Answer to the question: My friends, let us leave it to time.

Percy wisely made his honeymoon a long one; he

mined to be quite sure of his superior influence his wife, before he trusted her within reach of ather again. Mr. and Mrs. Bowmore accompanied ain Bervie on his way back to England, as far as ogne. In that pleasant town, the banished patriot ıp his tent. It was a cheaper place to live in than , and it was conveniently close to England, when ad quite made up his mind whether to be exile ıartyr. In the end, the course of events settled question for him. Mr. Bowmore returned to Eng- with the return of the Habeas Corpus Act.

II.

THE years passed. Percy and Charlotte (judged from the romantic point of view) became two perfectly uninteresting married people. Bervie (always remaining a bachelor) rose steadily in his profession, through the higher grades of military rank. Mr. Bowmore, wisely overlooked by a new Government, sank back again into the obscurity from which shrewd ministers would never have assisted him to emerge. The one subject of interest left, among the persons of this little drama, was now represented by Doctor Lagarde. Thus far, not a trace had been discovered of the French physician, who had so strangely associated the visions of his magnetic sleep with the destinies of the two men who had consulted him.

Steadfastly maintaining his own opinion of the prediction and the fulfilment, Bervie persisted in believing that he and Lagarde (or Percy and Lagarde) were yet destined to meet, and resume the unfinished consultation at the point where it had been broken off. Persons, happy in the possession of "sound common sense," who declared the prediction to be skilled guess-work, and the fulfilment manifest coincidence—other persons, whose minds halted midway between the mystic and the rational view, and who set up a theory of "thought-reading" as the true solution of the problem—agreed, nevertheless, in ridiculing the idea of finding Doctor

Lagarde as closely akin to that other celebrated idea of finding the needle in the bottle of hay. But Bervie's obstinacy was proverbial. Nothing shook his confidence in his own convictions.

More than thirteen years had elapsed since the consultation at the Doctor's lodgings, when Bervie went to Paris to spend a summer holiday with his friend the chaplain to the English embassy. His last words to Percy and Charlotte when he took his leave were: "Suppose I meet with Doctor Lagarde?"

It was then the year 1830. Bervie arrived at his friend's rooms on the 24th of July. On the 27th of the month, the famous revolution broke out which dethroned Charles the Tenth in three days.

On the second day Bervie and his host ventured into the streets, watching the revolution (like other reckless Englishmen) at the risk of their lives. In the confusion around them, they were separated. Bervie, searching for his companion, found his progress stopped by a barricade, which had been desperately attacked, and desperately defended. Men in blouses, and men in uniform, lay dead and dying together: the tricoloured flag waved over them, in token of the victory of the people. Bervie had just revived a poor wretch with a drink from an overthrown bowl of water, which still had a few drops left in it, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder from behind. He turned and discovered a National Guard, who had been watching his charitable action. "Give a hand to that poor fellow," said the citizen; "he wants someone to help him." He looked as he spoke at a workman standing near, grimed with blood and gunpowder. The tears were rolling down the man's cheeks. "I can't see

my way, sir, for crying," he said. "Help me to carry that sad burden into the next street." He pointed to a rude wooden litter, on which lay a dead or wounded man, his face and breast covered with an old cloak. "There is the best friend the people ever had," the workman said. "He cured us, comforted us, respected us, loved us. And there he lies, shot dead while he was binding up the wounds of friends and enemies alike!"

"Whoever he is, he has died nobly," Bervie answered. "May I look at him?"

The workman signed that he might look.

Bervie lifted the cloak—and met with Doctor Lagarde once more.

THE END.

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